HANS ULRICH GUMBRECHT

AFTER 1945

LATENCY AS ORIGIN OF THE PRESENT

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In loving memory of YASUSHI ISHII,
who was born September 8, 1959, in Chiba,
and died December 17, 2011, in Tokyo:
a younger brother
living through a similar past.

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ONE CAR AWAY FROM DEATH: AN OVERTURE

S. cannot remember a single Christmas Eve during his childhood that he did not spend in his grandparents' house—a former hunting cabin that was cozy, if isolated, a little more than two hundred miles northwest of his home town. In the winter season, the tall trees surrounding the house created a picture-perfect setting for the holidays. Remarkably, S.'s grandfather had managed to buy a car for the boy's parents: a brand new beige Opel Olympia. For some complex, administrative reason S. did not understand, the license plate was stamped "British Occupied Zone," where the grandparents lived. Since S. and his parents inhabited the American Occupied Zone, the words radiated an almost exotic aura of foreignness. The ride to the cabin led through the hills of the Spessart, west of Frankfurt. At the time, the American military made constant use of the area for field training—exercises documented in *G.I. Blues*, a film starring Elvis Presley from the early 1960s. Especially for that part of the trip, which snow and ice often made dangerous, the parents had had a heater installed in the car. S. was proud to have been assigned the job of keeping the rear window—or at least part of it—warm enough for the driver to see through.

One year on the Christmas trip, their vehicle was slowly following, behind a Volkswagen Beetle, an American tank. All of a sudden, the tank slowly veered left and began to spin in circles, as if engaged in a wild, irresistible, and ever-accelerating dance. The father later explained that this must have happened because one of its chains had broken. S. witnessed the front end of the tank—the part beneath the protruding cannon—seize the Volkswagen and immediately flatten the area where the passengers were seated; then, it dragged the Beetle about, transforming it into a wreck that no longer even looked like a car. S.'s parents had stopped driving and were waiting for the tank to finish its dance. For a brief moment, his mother and father, who were doctors, debated whether it was their obligation to offer assistance to the passengers of the Volkswagen. When the tank finally came to a rest, they decided all help would come too late, anyway. Slowly, they drove past the scene, continuing their journey to the grandparents' house in the woods. (For the next few days, S. obsessively tried to picture the bodies of two human beings fused into the metal ball that had once been a car.)

They did not want to make the grandfather wait. He always calculated the exact time of their possible arrival, and he was never satisfied unless it seemed that S.'s father had neither gone too fast nor been delayed by circumstances beyond his control.

The grandfather had been born in the small village that lay half an hour from the hunting cabin. During the years of National Socialism, he amassed a fortune in a nearby industrial city, operating a few bars in the red light district and running a small factory that produced high-proof liquor. As S. knows today, the grandfather—who gave the family its name—had moved back to the countryside in the final weeks of the war. Probably, he was more interested in evading what would become known as the "de-nazification process" than in fleeing American soldiers, about whom he spoke derisively. (They had insisted—unlike true warriors—on checking all the rooms in the cabin, "as if it was dangerous.") Until he died in 1958, the grandfather and his wife never moved back from the village. They managed to keep their business profitable by making weekly excursions to the city—and with the support of a diabolical-looking secretary who was always carrying on about "matter" and how eternal life was an illusion (as if he meant to announce his own suicide, which occurred long before the grandfather's death).

Indeed, the grandfather's business flourished so greatly that he had bought a large black Opel Kapitaen with white wall tires. He also hired a driver with a Polish name, who wore a hat that looked like a policeman's (which must have been his idea of what a professional uniform looked like). Every year, they celebrated Christmas Eve in the warmth of the cabin, surrounded by the romantic landscape covered in snow. They sang carols and reminisced—this was S.'s favorite part—about a past that felt alternately remote and glorious, then immediate and real. In these stories, the American and British authorities were always the "bad guys" one had to put up with in order to be realistic about the situation. One story in particular fascinated him, although he never quite understood it fully. It involved large glass containers full of alcohol, hidden somewhere in the forest. At some point shortly after the war, the grandfather—much to his regret but in recognition of practical necessity—had decided to destroy them, despite concerns that he might start a fire.

CHAPTER 1

EMERGENCE OF LATENCY?

A Generation's Beginning

June 15, 1948, was a bright yet muggy Tuesday in Bavaria. What would become of Germany appeared altogether uncertain: the nation's immediate past weighed heavily, even if people hardly talked about it. Nobody seemed aware—perhaps no one really cared—that just one week later the future would be determined. The front page of the *Sueddeutsche Zeitung—Muenchner Nachrichten aus Politik, Kultur, Wirtschaft und Sport* looked much the same then as it does now, except that on this day it featured a black-and-white photograph of Carl Zuckmayer (a German-born author who had become American) with his wife and his daughter, and the price was just twenty *Pfennig*. At the top of the page, five articles presented the key political news of the moment, in Germany and abroad, in a strangely detached fashion. It was announced that preparations for currency reform (*Waehrungsreform*) in the three zones occupied by Allied forces had now been finished; all that remained was to wait for official word about the exact date the new monetary order would go into effect. Another article covered a campaign speech President Truman had delivered in Berkeley, California, where he appealed to the Soviet Union not to abandon the collective effort to secure the democratic future of a united Germany. (In all likelihood, the Western allies and Soviet Union were equally inclined to partition the country, even though, for reasons of political gamesmanship, each side had to impute the plan to the other one.) Two brief items reported that the French Parliament was hesitant to ratify the initial political steps necessary to establish a West German state, despite the decision reached thirteen days earlier in London by the other Western allies and Holland, Belgium, and Luxemburg. Finally, the American Military Governor, General Clay, was quoted in a press conference promising that the United States would make every effort to assure "East German representation" in the new state. Four of these five articles were composed in the neutral style typical of press agencies—indeed, they came from AP, Dena-Reuter, and UP. The sole item to be written by newspaper staff, although it discussed

imminent economic reform—and therefore a matter of vital existential concern—may well have struck the most dispassionate tone of all. Elsewhere on the page, two other features adopted a somewhat livelier—and occasionally aggressive—style, even though they addressed topics warranting greater tact and reserve from the German editors. The first was the well-known column on the left (which still runs today) entitled “Das Streiflicht” [“the side-light”]. On June 15, 1948, the column voiced criticism of American geopolitical strategy; in particular, it objected to the fact that the U.S., through a Foreign Legion approved by the Senate, was lending support to the Jewish State, which had been founded in the former British protectorate one month and one day earlier. With unabashed anti-Semitism concealed by a pacifistic veneer, *Streiflicht* mocked sixty-four non-Jewish Germans who had volunteered to fight for the cause and been rejected by Israeli authorities: “We Germans could not have wished for a better way to rid ourselves of the lingering element of military aggression in our society.” The most space—and self-congratulatory enthusiasm—was devoted to the “Second International Youth Manifestation” taking place in Munich, where fourteen hundred participants had gathered from twenty-one countries. The guests of honor included thirty German prisoners of war the French authorities had released for the occasion. Carl Zuckmayer received thundering applause when he declared that the youngest generation of Germans could not be held responsible for the most recent chapter of the nation’s past. The following day, as part of the “Manifestation,” the University of Munich was scheduled to confer, with full academic pomp and ceremony, an honorary doctorate upon the French novelist Jules Romains. Surprisingly, a belated delegation was announced from Spain—from a country, that is, where the military government (which had supported Hitler) was completely isolated from the emergent political order in Western Europe. This delegation received a particularly emotional welcome.

The young people gathered in Munich, the newspaper reported, “spoke of their German friends with great respect”; they wanted to be “good neighbors,” and they were “even impressed by the quality of the rationed food supply.” The matter of obtaining food—where and how to do so—was a concern of the first order for the *Sueddeutsche Zeitung* and its readers. A lengthy article on page three (of the four pages comprising that day’s edition) discussed the legally sanctioned opportunity to buy meat from

diseased animals [*Freibank*]; it made light of the physical needs the measure implied by describing, with ironic undertones, more than three thousand persons waiting in line. Culture, like food, received attention in terms of supply and quantity. Under the rubric, “High Tide for Cabarets,” three evenings of political cabaret in Munich were written up. The paper also reported on several new productions of classical dramas—plays by Lope de Vega and Henri de Montherlant, whose works were ubiquitous at the time. (Without a doubt, French culture enjoyed unrivaled prestige, as had always been the case in Germany before 1933.) The newspaper also ran a story on the exhibition at *Haus der Kunst*—opened by none other than General Clay—featuring works by Renaissance masters that American authorities had returned to the State of Bavaria. Even for a paper of just four pages, the sports section occupied little space, at least by today’s standards. It opened with the program of a boxing contest—boxing was probably the most popular sport in Germany then—that involved the cities of Zurich and Munich; the article applauded the event as a generous gesture on the part of the Swiss to end the ban on German athletes at international events. In contrast, a strangely elegaic tone permeated the soccer coverage: “The team from Mannheim, despite a more mature style, did not manage a single goal; Munich 1860 scored once. One hopes that their offense, which left so much to be desired, will return to form one day.” The bottom half of the same page was completely filled by ads for vacant positions. The most sought-after parties were men and women competent in business, administration, and typewriting, and “girls” to work as housekeepers (*Alleinmaedchen*). That day, the paper ran no ads from people seeking employment.

Without knowledge of local and historical context, a reader would have been hard pressed to imagine that the *Sueddeutsche* published on June 15, 1948, was written, printed, and distributed in a city whose urban center still lay in ruins from air raids. This city had been the official home of the German National Socialist Workers’ Party—the party of Adolf Hitler and Heinrich Himmler—which had unleashed upon humanity crimes of unprecedented technological perfection. It would have been even more difficult for the average reader to find signs of the truly miraculous (more than simply “dramatic”) turnaround that Munich and the country as a whole were soon to experience. It seems that those who had survived the war were so busy scrambling to survive in the new, everyday reality of peace that they could not appreciate their own achievements. Still less, it seems, could

they gauge their own blindness. On that day late in spring, when the horrors of the past stood to one side and future success lay on the other, life likely felt as flat and pointedly featureless as the music broadcast on the American Forces Network—for example, Benny Goodman's "On a Slow Boat to China."

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The new currency, called *Deutsche Mark*, began to circulate under rainy skies in the American, British, and French zones on Sunday, June 20, 1948. Each citizen had the right to exchange up to forty old *Reichsmark* for the same amount in new money. A further allocation of twenty marks was scheduled for August. Larger amounts of cash could be traded at the rate of a hundred (old) to five (new); for checking and savings accounts, as well as outstanding payments, the rate stood at ten to one. Rationing restrictions were lifted on more than four hundred kinds of goods. Although the measures were accompanied by fear and a rise in unemployment, they proved effective in cutting ties to a debilitating part of the country's past and paved the way for the "economic miracle" that would set the existential tone for the first years of the Federal Republic.

The speed of *Waehrungsreform* in the West caught the administration of the country's Eastern half off-guard. Three days later, in order to protect the Soviet zone from being inundated with old—and now worthless—*Reichsmarks*, currency reform was implemented here, too. Economic transition in the East differed from its Western counterpart inasmuch as the authorities pursued the objective of social justice by offering better exchange rates to people with smaller amounts of money at their disposal. One day later, on Thursday, June 24—intensifying a tendency to intervene politically and militarily in response to world-political threats—the Soviet Union interrupted all land, rail, and water traffic between the Western part of Germany and Berlin. Despite doubts that were logistical, technical, and, above all, strategic in nature, General Clay, with the support of the British authorities, immediately ordered that an air bridge to Berlin be struck. Within a few weeks, two hundred sixty-nine British and three hundred fourteen American aircraft were making some five hundred and fifty flights a day. These missions, which went from Frankfurt, Hannover, and Hamburg to three West Berlin airports (Tempelhof, Gatow, and, beginning in December, Tegel), reestablished control over the former capital's Western

sectors and secured the survival of its population. Within less than a hundred hours between June 20 and June 24, 1948, the postwar had ended, and the Cold War (which had already been discerned as a nightmarish possibility for world affairs) began to materialize as the new reality. Before the end of the month, the Committee of the Eastern European Communist Parties under the leadership of the Soviet Union (*Kominform*)—seemingly obsessed with drawing sharp divisions on the political landscape—had excluded Yugoslavia's Communist Party on the grounds that it harbored "Anti-Soviet and Anti-Internationalist attitudes." Less than two months later, the countries occupying the West German zones announced the surprising decision that deliberations about the new constitution would take place in Bonn, a small university town near Cologne.

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If, in the few weeks it took for the contours of a new world order to become visible, people seemed strangely unaware of the tensions that shaped their actions, the final months of the war had witnessed scenes of grotesque simultaneities and hysteria. Consider, for example, the chilling photograph from April 1945, in which Adolf Hitler—looking frail and much older than his fifty-six years—shakes hands with a line of boys in uniform, *as if* they were real soldiers, *as if* he still had any military (or even paternal) authority, *as if* the war were not long lost, and *as if* the youths actually believed there was any point to sacrificing their lives. Does this "as if" concern our impression, today, that certain gestures seem out of place, unsuited to the environment in which they occurred? Or is the "as if" an approximate formula (however inadequate) for the combination of helplessness and cynicism that marked the moment itself and the way it was experienced? Is it possible that, by the spring of 1945, Hitler still believed in his calling? Is it possible that the boys trusted him? Were the Germans who—a few days after unconditional surrender—were forced to walk through the concentration camps that their government and fellow citizens had built, actually being sincere when they claimed to have been unaware of these massive engines of death? What were my parents thinking when they sent friends and relatives cards of handmade paper (*Buettenpapier*) inscribed with Gothic letters to announce their engagement party on April 20, 1945? Even though they were not particularly active in the Party, this was Hitler's

birthday, and festivities were scheduled to take place in Dortmund, where one of the fiercest battles of the war had raged until only a few days before. Did they see any problem at all? Did it cross their minds that the damaged houses where they would be sleeping, eating, and having sex were somehow mismatched with the overly formal invitation cards? Or did they act as if nothing were happening because the abyss was simply too deep—and too near—to confront? Did ignorance enable them to survive? Was Hitler or anyone else in his piteous, subterranean *Bunker* really convinced, "philosophically" or "religiously" (if such adverbs are admissible in this context), when they claimed it was necessary and just for the German "race" to perish—to be physically destroyed and removed from the face of the planet—because it had proven weaker than other "races" and therefore unworthy of dominance?

. . .

The grotesque stridency of the final stage of war was fated to disappear after the unconditional surrender of May 8, 1945. However, the "as if" of aggressively ignoring continued among survivors as the conditions of life grew worse than anyone could have anticipated. Such was the impression that the twenty-three year old Swedish journalist Stig Dagerman (*Deutscher Herbst '46*) took away from his visit to Germany. Dagerman came during the autumn of 1946 to report on the situation—in all likelihood, one without historic or existential precedent—in a series of thirteen articles that appeared in Stockholm the following year. In merciless detail, Dagerman described the everyday life of a family inhabiting a ground-floor apartment that was permanently flooded. To say they were living under "prehistoric conditions" would be insufficient: they were people from a modern civilization who had been violently pushed back into cave life. Every step posed a risk, they had learned how to sleep without moving, and the threat of disease lurked everywhere. Instead of going to school or exercising a profession, children and grown-ups had to hunt for food; they spent their days gathering fuel for fire; occasionally, they bartered what they had found for clothing. No one had the time, energy, or desire to consider what might have caused their situation. Life was simply a matter of escaping death, every day. The few Germans who had the luxury of an occasional pause accepted, without protest, that the Allies held absolute control over what

had been “their” country. At the same time, it must have felt natural for them to tell the foreign observer that they were being treated unfairly. Were they speaking truthfully and in good faith when they asked Dagerman whether they were responsible for Hitler and twelve years of Nazi rule? Were they acting honestly when they observed that the Germans, after their own military victories, had never treated other nations with comparable severity?

With the exception of the Nuremberg Trials, the Allies let German lawyers “with a clean record” preside over “de-nazification”—a process that provided the inevitable condition for reentry into professional and civic life. Dagerman took a dim view of this logistical decision. While he did not accuse the new civil servants (who, for the most part, had exercised the same profession before 1945) of blatant injustice or cronyism, he found that they lacked the passion and dedication necessary to detect and punish the crimes of the past; he thought they were failing to make a break comparable to the split that was to occur in the economic system some eighteen months later. Finally, Dagerman noticed mounting tension between two generations of Germans. Those between the ages of fifteen and thirty clearly blamed their older siblings and parents—that is, the people who had been in charge of the country between 1933 and 1945—for jeopardizing the present and future. In contrast—and more surprisingly—many older Germans believed that the younger generation should have protected (or even freed) the nation from Nazi rule. As Dagerman observed, no one really felt responsible.

An emblematic and notorious case involves the philosopher Martin Heidegger. For reasons that were biographically and intellectually convenient (that is, the worst possible reasons), Heidegger joined the NSDAP on May 1, 1933—ten days after being elected *Rektor* of the University of Freiburg (with the Party’s approval). Almost from the beginning, Heidegger’s administrative tenure must have been problematic to the new rulers who, as far as we can tell, never even began to understand the importance of his philosophical work. Almost exactly a year after taking office, Heidegger asked to resign, and the request was granted. From that moment on, the philosopher kept distant from politics, even university politics. Occasionally, Heidegger offered critical remarks—albeit mild ones—about how the National Socialist movement was not fulfilling its historical mission. However, he never had the courage (nor, in all likelihood, the will) to quit the Party. In early 1947, Heidegger’s French

reader and admirer Jean Beaufret sent a letter in which he asked the philosopher how he viewed—and, by implication, how he might now review or re-envision—the notion of "Humanism." Clearly, Beaufret had been inspired by Jean-Paul Sartre's lecture "L'existentialisme est un humanisme," which was very influential at the time. Heidegger's reaction was less than politely negative. In a text destined to assume great importance after Germany's unconditional surrender, he presented a vision of the contemporary state of philosophy (or "thinking," as he preferred to say) that is unsparingly bleak. Such bleakness, I believe, resonates with the material condition of Germany at this moment in time.

Heidegger begins with a rhetorical question that heightens the position of authority he assumes in his conversation with Beaufret:

> (Sie fragen: Comment redonner un sens au mot "Humanisme"? Diese Frage kommt aus der Absicht, das Wort "Humanismus" festzuhalten. Ich frage mich, ob das noetig sei. Oder ist das Unheil, das alle Titel dieser Art anrichten, noch nicht offensichtlich genug? (*Gesamtausgabe 9*, 315))
>
> You ask: *Comment redonner un sens au mot "Humanisme"?* The question signifies the intention to hold on the word "Humanism." I wonder if this is necessary. Are the ills produced by words of this kind not yet obvious enough?

It was never Heidegger's style to admit he developed—much less modified—his philosophical positions in response to events in his surroundings. Here, however, the words "not yet" indicate that he is reacting to the influence of the devastating present. The *Letter on Humanism* offers a fundamental critique of traditional anthropocentrism. More specifically, this critique emphasizes that whatever importance *Dasein* ("human existence") holds, it assumes this significance in relation to the "unconcealment of Being"—that is, the event of truth as a higher destiny (*Geschick*) in which *Dasein* plays a role without ever knowing why or how this role matters. As if he had never wanted to be what he had become (at least during his time as *Rektor* at Freiburg)—that is, a philosopher of a new conception of nationhood as a decisive existential frame—Heidegger rejected both nationalism and internationalism as inadequate configurations within the history of Being:

> Angesichts der wesenhaften Heimatlosigkeit des Menschen zeigt sich dem seinsgeschichtlichen Denken das kuenftige Geschick des Menschen darin, dass er in die Wahrheit des Seins findet und sich zu diesem Finden auf den Weg macht. Jeder Nationalismus ist metaphysisch ein Anthropologismus und als solcher Subjektivismus. Der Nationalismus wird durch den blossen Internationalismus nicht ueberwunden, sondern nur erweitert und zum System gebracht. Der Nationalismus wird dadurch sowenig zur Humanitas gebracht und aufgehoben, wie der

> Individualismus durch den geschichtslosen Kollektivismus. Dieser ist die Subjektivitaet des Menschen in der Totalitaet. Er vollzieht ihre unbedingte Selbstbehauptung. Diese laesst sich nicht rueckgaengig machen. Sie laesst sich durch ein halbseitig vermitteltes Denken nicht einmal ausreichend erfahren. Ueberall kreist der Mensch ausgestossen aus der Wahrheit des Seins, um sich selbst als animal rationale. (341ff.)
>
> Facing the essential homelessness of human existence, the future destiny of man reveals itself within history of Being as a finding of the truth of Being and a setting out for this path. In a metaphysical sense, any kind of nationalism is anthropocentric, and as such it is subjectivist. Mere internationalism will not overcome nationalism—on the contrary, it will only broaden it and take it to the level of a system. As collectivism without history will not redeem individualism, internationalism will not bring nationalism closer to *humanitas*. Collectivism is human subjectivity in its totalitarian form. It gives reality to unconditional human self-affirmation. There is no way of turning things around. It is not even possible to gain a sufficient experience of this situation through our usual, only half-mediated thinking. Everywhere human existence is excluded from the truth of Being as it only concerned with itself as *animale rationale*.

To read this passage in the bluntest terms, the philosophical metaphor of *Heimatlosigkeit* ("homelessness") transformed the fate of the millions of Germans who had lost their familiar conditions of existence—to say nothing of the physical destruction that had occurred in German cities—into a concretization of what, according to Heidegger, represented the true crisis of the moment: the incapacity, perhaps even the ineptitude, of the current generation to apprehend its fate (*Ge-Schick*), i.e., the place-in-the-world to which unconcealed Being had assigned and sent them. Never before, I suspect, had his views of ontology and existence sounded more convincing than now, in a time of utter humility. The same held true for philosophy itself:

> Es ist an der Zeit, dass man sich dessen entwoehnt, die Philosophie zu ueberschaetzen und sie deshalb zu ueberfordern. Noetig ist in der jetzigen Weltnot: weniger Philosophie, aber mehr Achtsamkeit des Denkens; weniger Literatur, aber mehr Pflege des Buchstabens.
>
> Das kuenftige Denken ist nicht mehr Philosophie, weil es urspuenglicher denkt als die Metaphysik, welcher Name das gleiche sagt. Das kuenftige Denken kann aber auch nicht mehr, wie Hegel verlangte, den Namen der "Liebe zur Weisheit" ablegen und die Weisheit selbst in der Gestalt des absoluten Wissens geworden sein. Das Denken ist auf dem Abstieg in die Armut seines vorlaeufigen Wesens. Das Denken sammelt die Sprache in das einfache Sagen. Die Sprache ist so die Sprache des Seins, wie die Wolken die Wolken des Himmels sind. Das Denken legt mit seinem Sagen unscheinbare Furchen in die Sprache. Sie sind noch unscheinbarer als die Furchen, die der Landmann langsamen Schrittes durch das Feld zieht. (364)
>
> It is time to stop overestimating philosophy and, thereby, burdening it with expectations it cannot fulfill. What we most need in the present misery of our world is less philosophy, and greater attention to thinking; less literature, and greater care for the letter.
>
> In the future, thinking will no longer be philosophy because it will think in a more authentic way than metaphysics did (and metaphysics is synonymous with "philosophy"). Nor will future thinking fulfill Hegel's promise that, abandoning its name of "love of wisdom," it will become wisdom in the form of absolute knowledge. Thinking now finds itself in a state of decline relative to its initial essence. Thinking now gathers language into simply-saying. Thus, language becomes

> the language of Being as clouds are the clouds in the sky. Through the simplicity of what it says, thinking traces humble furrows within language. They are humbler, even, than the furrows the peasant slowly makes on the field.

In 1947, when Heidegger wrote these words about the "misery of the world" and the "poverty" of philosophy and employed images from the world of agriculture, the food supply in Germany had reached a level so low that it was life-threatening. After an unusually cold winter and a parched summer, the average daily caloric intake for adults had dropped to nine hundred—that is, to six hundred calories below the minimum limit determined by occupying Allied forces. Before the war, the figure had stood at three thousand. In the same period, the divorce rate rose from 8.9 per ten thousand people (1939) to eighteen (1948).

. . .

In the early summer of 1948, things improved, yet very few Germans seemed to see the great change that was approaching. Was it because their situation had been so wretched for so long—for all time, as they thought—that they had lost the ability to imagine, or even to dream of, a different life? Did it seem impossible to return from their prehistoric state? In the May 1948 issue of *Die Wandlung*—an influential monthly journal of impressive intellectual quality and strongly democratic convictions edited by Dolf Sternberger, Karl Jaspers, Marie Luise Kaschnitz, and Alfred Weber—there shone faint glimpses of optimism: "With more normal weather and a somewhat better supply of fertilizers, one hopes that the harvest will improve and perhaps provide between twelve hundred and thirteen hundred calories per day, instead of last year's eight hundred." On the same pages, the editors affirmed, with an eye to the whole and a long-term perspective, Germany must rejoin the international community of trade and commerce, which would benefit all countries. Dolf Sternberger observed that the role of the nation state in international politics was on the wane, to be replaced by a tension between the "two parties" (as he called them): the American and Soviet blocs. The legal scholar and future *Bundestag* representative Adolf Arndt made the most brilliant and philosophically complex contribution to that particular issue. Like Heidegger, Arndt argued that a traditional "belief in mankind" had gone missing in the contemporary crisis, along with the conviction that humans possessed the means to resolve the problems they would continue to face.

One example he mentioned, which involved a process that was not yet complete, concerned the twofold transition from the "sacred State" [*Sakralstaat*] to the "social State," and the change from the "national State" to a universal order. Arndt remarked that, under these conditions, an intense —and understandable—desire for substantial religious or ethical "values" was emerging, a desire for fixed positions to provide orientation in life. He was arguing, however, that only a legal framework that set aside such matters would prove sufficiently flexible to assure lasting peace in an overwhelmingly complex environment; in other words: only if one renounced short-term solutions was survival (or even mid-term success) possible.

. . .

Less than five years later, the problems confronting middle-class Germans like my parents felt very different. I never heard them speak about their engagement party eighteen days before the unconditional surrender. My father had been an American prisoner of war for about a year, in a camp called "Oklahoma" close to the French town of Reims. If the photographs he brought home are to be trusted, he spent the time under conditions that almost qualify as comfortable. When my father was released [although he occasionally told us he had escaped], the commander of the camp actually wrote a letter of recommendation—"To Whom it May Concern"—in which he lauded him for providing assistance to fellow prisoners; my father, whose medical training was nearly complete, was a doctor in all but name. My parents had gotten married in May 1947, a few months before the postwar famine reached its peak. Unsurprisingly, most of their memories of that day concerned the excessive intake of food (which held unpleasant consequences for some of the guests). They also had the good fortune to find employment at the university hospital in my hometown (which Allied bombing raids had left the second most devastated urban habitation in Europe; it is no coincidence that its Japanese "sister city" is Nagasaki). Their two salaries of about two hundred marks enabled my parents to afford the luxury of a nanny. Her name was Helgard and she was the daughter of a railroad worker. I still remember that she was very beautiful—and much more caring than my mother. One day, however, I was informed that Helgard would not be coming back. "She has turned evil" (*sie ist boese*

geworden), my mother said, declining to provide any further details. Helgard's place was taken by a nun with a starchy veil, who made me get down on my knees—to pray to the Lord, I suppose—before breakfast. The first person I ever missed in my life was Helgard. One evening, in the tiny room in the hospital where we lived at the time, I overheard my parents tell a friend the true reason she had been let go: "She hangs out with Existentialists" [*sie verkehrt in Existentialistenkellern*]. Needless to say, I had no clue what "Existentialists" were, and it was even less clear to me what they were doing in cellars [*Kellern*]. Just as little, I imagine, did my surgeon parents know about the latest intellectual trend from France that was influencing German minds. They had quickly retreated to the safe world where, as a matter of course, high walls were deemed necessary to protect one's middle-class lifestyle from the threat of eccentricity. Occasionally, they would mention "the War," but I only understood it in the vaguest way, as an event before I was born that wasn't necessarily even bad. I associated the war with the many ruins in my hometown, but I had never seen cities without ruins, and I soon discovered that they were fun to play in.

At some point in 1950, my father spent about half a year as an intern in Munich to be accredited in urology—which, at the time, was just emerging as a field of practice and research independent from general surgery. From there, he sent letters with drawings and picture postcards for his baby son. On some of them, parts of the city appear exactly as they do today—that is, like a nineteenth-century capital of a small monarchy—with an opulent air of old money and large cars (above all, meticulously preserved Mercedes, but also British and American models of monumental dimensions). Other photographs present Munich as a gigantic construction site, busy with the traffic of smaller vehicles—*Volkswagen*, above all, some *Opels*, and trucks carrying dirt and building materials. The few people who are not seen driving cars all seem to be in a hurry. I also found a color postcard, dated 1955, that shows the future of the city where my father was living. Once again, cars are featured. The picture presents a gas station officially declared to be "large" (*Gross-Garage*) in Nymphenburg, an elegant residential neighborhood that takes its name from a summer castle built in the early eighteenth century. The *Gross-Garage* is not, in fact, all that large—yet it seems proud of itself all the same. Just one automobile—a black Mercedes limousine, probably the 220 series—stands there, waiting for the

gas to be pumped. The vehicle has the compact, almost square body of the first generation of Mercedes built after the war. A white stripe adorns its black tires—a sign of distinction and elegance adopted from the United States. Outside the garage, a carefully painted red and black Volkswagen caravan is stationed. On the front of the van hangs one sign for an insurance firm [it must be *DAS*, that is, *Deutscher Automobilschutz*] and another for the notorious *ADAC* [*Allgemeiner Deutscher Automobil-Club*]. Two narrow blinds sit on top of the reflectors, probably to reduce glare from the headlights. Because they also look like eyelids, they make the van seem to have a shy yet friendly face. The world of the *Gross-garage* is calm, peaceful, and self-satisfied. Unless the photograph actually happened to have been taken on a Sunday, it looks like this was a time when every day wanted to be the weekend.

. . .

Surprisingly perhaps, it seems this mood of contentment was not exclusively German at the middle of the twentieth century. Nor was it—as one might think—specific to countries that had participated in the war. I have postcards from 1948 that I found at a flea market in Lisbon. They all are personal photographs in postcard format, to be mailed to friends, relatives, and loved ones. Carefully groomed young men sent black-and-white portraits to female cousins and friends, always with “greetings” and often with a few words (for example, “this is to remember how I looked,” on a specific day). As charged with dream and desire as these pictures must have been, their language never contains ambiguous hints—let alone a joke or *risqué* remark.

I also possess a photograph of a young Portuguese family. The mother is as beautiful as any film star from her time—the Rita Hayworth type, with a darker complexion. Despite a defined bone structure, her perfectly symmetrical face is soft; the arch of her lips lends her mouth a distant smile. The father’s apparel is impeccable and surely expensive. While probably the same age as his wife, he seems eager to look serious—the kind of man who feels uncomfortable without a suit and tie. However, his plump body looks like it belongs either to an ugly child or to an old man too fat to move. His arms are short, his complexion puffed, and his lips press together as if they were holding in a word he cannot utter. It is hard to imagine anyone

liking him “at first glance”—can he be trusted? Or, to put things differently: is he just too weak and unhappy to enjoy his status, or is he potentially dangerous? Between the beautiful mother and the uncanny father, on a chair, stands the daughter, who must be about three years old. She wears a fancy checkered dress, the kind worn by Shirley Temple or even by children in the British aristocracy of the time. One cannot help thinking that, one day, the girl’s face will resemble her father’s; this, however, does not keep her from looking “cute,” as we would say today—or “like a baroque angel,” as one might have put it then. Ever since I first bought this postcard, I have suspected there is a story latent within it, the kind one could never invent. The story must be a real drama, complicated and maybe painful—the story of a physical defect, perhaps, or betrayal, or even a crime; it is a story we will never hear, even though we can feel its presence.

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What is there about that time—which already withheld so much then, a good sixty years ago—that matters now? It is instructive to compare the years after 1945 to the period, less than three decades earlier, that followed the first war to have received the honorific “world.” This time was experienced as a moment of profound depression, and not just by intellectuals. If the mobilization that occurred all over Europe in early August 1914 had been a universal orgy of patriotic confidence, those who returned from the trenches in November 1918, whether victors or vanquished, shared a bleakly serious demeanor. Pictures and newsreels show that the world seems to have aged by decades within only four years. The frantic search for a foundation upon which a new life might be built—a search not unrelated to the traces of despair we encountered in Heidegger’s text from 1947—stirred within every social group after 1918. Ludwig Wittgenstein’s biography provides a particularly dramatic example which, at the same time, is also typical. Wittgenstein, in the most literal sense, wanted to start a new life after capitulation and the end of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. He did so by giving away his vast fortune and shifting his intellectual focus from engineering to philosophy.

What kind of experience in the First World War could account for the widespread feeling that it was impossible to continue existence as before? During the first months of military engagement, both sides had been

surprised that an easy victory, obtained by chivalric (or at least Napoleonic) means, could no longer occur. Now, paralytic combat in the trenches, where advances were small and costly, formed the horizon of warfare. The accelerated development of military technology—machine guns, aviation, and gas attacks—brought deep existential frustration. War on this scale no longer offered a framework for life in which individual bravery or genius mattered; this was not the same war in which Ernst Jünger still managed to experience individualized encounters and situations. The outcome of combat was now to be decided by the quantity and efficiency of the "material"; victory would go to the side with the greater industrial output and willingness to sacrifice its people's lives. In reaction, new ideologies—Communism and Fascism, above all—entered the public sphere, promising to define, allegedly with "new" values, the meaning of life and loss for individuals and collectives alike.

In terms of the extent of destruction and the penetration it achieved, the Second World War dwarfed the First. Astonishingly, however—and in marked contrast to the earlier conflict—it hardly prompted any effort to rethink human existence. Of course, intellectual responses did occur, but they did not seem to meet up with the general mood; consequently, important works such as Max Horkheimer's and Theodor W. Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* made a real impact only decades later. As I remarked above, the difference between the echoes of war after 1945 and after 1918 stands in chiastic relation to the devastation that occurred. In terms of geography, only the second conflict actually deserves the title of "World War." Estimates of the total number of casualties vary greatly, but the figures displayed at the *Musée de l'armée* in Paris provide a vivid basis for comparison. In World War I, the most affected nation was France, which counted 1.37 million victims; in World War II, the Soviet Union charted the greatest losses: 26.6 million deaths. The First World War offers no parallel to the more than six million people slaughtered in German camps between 1939 and 1945, nor does anything correspond to the unknown but even larger number of men, women, and children who died under different—but equally cruel—circumstances in the Soviet Union, Japan, and elsewhere.

The essential difference between the wars—what makes them truly incomparable from what one might call an "anthropological" perspective—does not admit quantification. The difference lies, first, in the cold perfection of industrialized execution that the German SS achieved, and,

second, in the threshold that was crossed when German and Japanese military leaders, realizing the war was lost to them, entertained the possibility of national self-destruction and even the global extinction of mankind. On August 6, 1945, when a nuclear bomb exploded over an inhabited city for the first time, the image of a nation's collective suicide—extended to the whole of humanity—became a material possibility within technological reach that the world will never be able to forget. We know—more from the faces immortalized on a handful of photographs than from the words of survivors—that the women and men who experienced that moment in Hiroshima believed they had encountered the beginning of the end of the world. There will never be enough future to prove them wrong.

. . .

Still, what has not already been said about that time? Why does it seem urgent to write another book about the period? It seems necessary because the impression of irreversible destruction—which made its presence felt so strongly in the years immediately following the war (and not just in lands where fighting occurred)—disappeared so quickly; or, to be more precise, it seems that the event left no traces comparable to those that marked the world after 1918. Looking at the issue of *Life* dated December 24, 1945, it occurs to me that Christmas that year may already have been the moment when the effects of irreversible destruction were neutralized, at least in the United States. The magazine presents page after page filled with words and pictures announcing how the world is in the process of returning to what it is always supposed to have been. One lengthy article bears the title "Japanese Farmer: He Comes Back from the War to the Ancient Pattern of Life in his Village." The captions that follow read, for example: "Soldier finds fat and crops fairly good despite bad rice failure"; "He still observes the ingrained Shinto rites"; and "The village of Harada is frugal, hard-working and unmarked by war." The catastrophes of Hiroshima and Nagasaki receive no mention. Instead, one finds an advertisement for "Graflex prize-winning cameras" with a photograph, taken by a U.S. Navy soldier, of Mount Vesuvius exploding; the smoke billows out in a mushroom-shaped cloud similar to the kind we have come to associate, ever since Hiroshima, with nuclear weapons.

Another picture, which fills half a page, shows three gorgeous young women wearing the latest fashions, seated together on a couch with their babies, like a perfectly symmetrical sculpture. They have all crossed their legs, left over right, and turned their eyes to the left-hand side. The caption reads:

> Three oldest daughters give bottles to their three infant children. Left to right: Jeanne, 22, with son Joe; Myrra Lee, 23, with son John; and Betty, 25, with daughter Julia. Jeanne's and Myrra Lee's husbands are out of service and attended the Christmas party. Jeanne's husband was an Eighth Air Force radio operator with 27 missions. Myrra Lee's was a shipfitter second class with 26 months' overseas duty. Betty's husband is missing in action.

Somehow, the spatial symmetry governing these beautiful mothers and their children absorbs the existential asymmetry that prevails between Jeanne and Myrrha Lee—whose husbands have returned—and Betty, whose husband remains missing in action. Some historians have remarked that Japan did not achieve a similar state of postwar neutralization until 1964, the year of the Tokyo Olympics. As for the situation in Germany and France, Peter Sloterdijk has argued that the mutual obsession and rivalry that had produced both excessive admiration and cruel wars over two centuries was now beginning to disappear. As the central axis of incipient European unification, the so-called "friendship" between the two countries would have to rely on mutual disinterest as a key condition. So how, then, can we describe the strange presence of a past that did not disappear, even though it seemed to have lost its impact? Didn't something in the decade following 1945 vanish rather than "emerge"?

. . .

I would like to avoid the word "repression" in describing the process that was underway. *Life* magazine could easily *not* have documented—it could easily have "repressed"—Betty's fate. But instead of being "repressed," the excitement of the war years became part of a new, quiet world. The facts and memory of events did not vanish, but the sensations of pain and triumph—that is, the resonances of war—faded. As the feelings caused by irreversible destruction disappeared, a mood of latency quickly emerged. (Perhaps the reason for the peculiar impression of paradox associated with the period originates here: personal feelings vanished and latency began to spread as an environment, a general mood.) When I speak of "latency" instead of "repression" or "oblivion," I mean the kind of situation the Dutch

historian Eelco Runia calls “presence,” which he uses the metaphor of the stowaway to illustrate. (Runia has explored the notion in depth in his contribution to *Latenz–blinde Passagiere in den Geisteswissenschaften*, a volume I edited together with Florian Klinger.)

In a situation of latency, when a stowaway is present, we sense that something (or somebody) is there that we cannot grasp or touch—and that this “something” (or somebody) has a material articulation, which means that it (or he, or she) occupies space. We are unable to say where, exactly, our certainty of the presence comes from, nor do we know where, precisely, what is latent is located now. And because we do not know the identity of the latent object or person, we have no guarantee that we would recognize this being if it ever showed itself. Moreover, what is latent may undergo changes while it remains hidden. Stowaways can age, for example. Most importantly: we have no reason to believe—at least no systematic reason—that what has entered a latent state will ever show itself or, conversely, not be forgotten one day.

No “methods” or standard procedures—and certainly no “interpretations”—exist that permit us to retrieve what has passed into latency. In order to be accessible to interpretation—i.e., to permit us to identify a meaning that seems to lie “under” a surface—the latent would have to bring forth, or assume the form of, “propositional content”; this may be possible at times, but it is unlikely in general. Yet how can we be so certain that something latent is “really there” if it eludes our very perception? To return to the example mentioned above, when I peruse these emphatically peaceful and orderly postwar magazines, I am struck by the violence that often peeks through in the advertising—as occurs, for instance, in the photograph of the volcanic explosion made with a Graflex camera. In a similar vein, the quality of razor blades is advertised by showing how smoothly they pass over the soft skin of a baby’s cheek. Cartoon representations of married life make jokes about husbands beating their spouses because the coffee isn’t strong enough, or because the wife has forgotten to wake the breadwinner up for work. There also seems to have been an obsession with pathologically agitated old men who urgently need a particular brand of medication.

. . .

Something like a disposition of violent nervousness permeates the seemingly quiet postwar world, which points to a latent state of affairs. I would like to employ the German concept of *Stimmung* as the basis for describing, in the central chapters of the book at hand, this complex configuration. Equally, I would like to stress that while *Stimmungen* often make us assume that something is latent, they rarely provide a means of identifying what it is—in general, *Stimmungen* emerge as effects of latent conditions, but they do not necessarily originate with them. The word *Stimmung* is most often (and accurately) translated as "mood"; on a metaphorical register, the term can be rendered as "climate" or "atmosphere." What the metaphors "climate" and "atmosphere" share with the word *Stimmung*—whose etymological root is *Stimme*, German for "voice"—is that they suggest the presence of a material touch, typically a very light one, on the body of the (ap)perceiving party. Weather, sounds, and music all have a material yet invisible impact on us. *Stimmung* involves a sensation we associate with certain "inner" feelings. Toni Morrison has described this aspect of *Stimmung* with the paradox of "being touched as if from inside." The images in postwar advertising of razor blades on babies' cheeks, of violent husbands, and of agitated grandfathers affect us in a bodily way inasmuch as they awaken feelings of discomfort within, for which we have no concepts. In the double sense of fleeting physical contact and feelings we cannot control, *Stimmungen* form an objective part of historical situations and periods. As such—that is, as conditions of "objective sensibility"—they constitute a central, if largely neglected, dimension of what can make the past present—immediately and intuitively present—to us. One might argue that the texts and genres we call "epic" have always made present the objective sensibility of the past, without trying to be factually accurate or proposing a historical interpretation.

. . .

Several years ago, I told a friend the urge I experienced—which at the time still struck me as unfamiliar and almost strange—to write about the years after 1945. Without any hesitation, doubt, or room for a question, he replied that Samuel Beckett's tragicomedy *Waiting for Godot* (which was produced for the first time at the Théâtre de Babylone in Paris in 1952/1953) needed to provide the centerpiece of any such book. It had never occurred to me

that this might be the case, but my friend's observation immediately became one of those certainties that, retrospectively, one takes for granted. *Waiting for Godot* not only stages the latent conditions of the period after the Second World War—it positively condenses an entire sea of latency into a single *Stimmung*. It never crosses Estragon's or Vladimir's mind that Godot, whom they have never seen, could be a phantom or not even exist at all. As the world appears to them, Godot's existence is a certainty. (Often, they tell each other as much, and carry on about the consequences of this fact.) Above all, the latent Godot obliges them to stay where they are:

> ESTRAGON: Charming spot. [*He turns, advances to front, halts, facing auditorium*.] Inspiring prospects. [*He turns to Vladimir.*] Let's go.
>
> VLADIMIR: We can't.
>
> ESTRAGON: Why not?
>
> VLADIMIR: We're waiting for Godot.
>
> ESTRAGON: [*despairingly*]. Ah! [*Pause*.] You are sure it was here? (8)

Godot, or "big God" (a contamination of the English word "god" with the French suffix: "*-ot*"), has the qualities of the God known to the Middle Ages, whose real presence no one ever called into question, even though it was never certain where, or how, this presence would be manifested. This state of affairs has not changed at the end of the tragicomedy:

> ESTRAGON: Oh yes, let's go far away from here.
>
> VLADIMIR: We can't.
>
> ESTRAGON: Why not?
>
> VLADIMIR: We have to come back tomorrow.
>
> ESTRAGON: What for?
>
> VLADIMIR: To wait for Godot.
>
> ESTRAGON: Ah! [*Silence*.] He didn't come? (107)

Since they have never seen him, Vladimir and Estragon have no guarantee that—and this is true of all that is latent—they would even recognize Godot if he appeared before them. It is even possible that Pozzo (whom they encounter twice) is Godot:

> ESTRAGON: You dreamt it. [*Pause*.] Let's go. We can't. Ah! [*Pause.*] Are you sure it was not him?
>
> VLADIMIR: Who?
>
> ESTRAGON: Godot?
>
> VLADIMIR: But who?
>
> ESTRAGON: Pozzo.
>
> VLADIMIR: Not at all! [*Less sure*]. Not at all! [*Still less sure*]. Not at all! (104)

Waiting for Godot introduces one effect of latency that has not yet come into focus. Waiting for Godot, who does not appear, freezes time, so to speak. Frozen time makes all progress and therefore action of any kind impossible—because actions need the future to transform themselves from motivations into realities. Beckett's play famously concludes with the following words:

> VLADIMIR: Well? Shall we go?
> ESTRAGON: Yes, let's go.—*They do not move* (109)

In a time that refuses to unfold, Vladimir and Estragon cannot advance, they cannot act—they cannot, even to kill themselves. As happens in old, bickering couples, nothing ever changes between them. In similar fashion, the master/slave-relationship between Pozzo and Lucky seems unchangeable. When Estragon and Vladimir meet Pozzo and Lucky for the second time, Pozzo tries to assume a submissive role vis-à-vis Vladimir and Estragon (evidently, it is impossible for him to be "equal" with anyone else). However, this holds no consequences for the power relations between Lucky and him, as Lucky remains his master's animal and slave. When Lucky tries to think, it also changes nothing; thinking doesn't help Vladimir and Estragon to get closer to Godot's latency (his "presence in absence") and possible arrival. When Lucky "thinks," it only makes Estragon and Vladimir switch from boredom to "violent protest." What the play and its protagonists call "thinking" (like Vladimir's and Estragon's "walking") really means movement that leads nowhere.

. . .

I will not jump to the (all-too-general) conclusion that, as the war's impact faded into a *Stimmung* of latency, time in the postwar froze and stood still. All I will say here (before taking the matter up again in the seventh and final chapter) is that the lives of my generation have been attended by the expectation and hope—which, condensed in a series of historical moments over the six and half decades that now separate us from 1945—that something "latent" would come to the fore and show itself, enabling us finally to escape the long shadow of a *Stimmung* whose origin we were never able to identify; but that this expectation and hope for an unveiling of latency—which amounts to a generational longing for "redemption"—has never been fulfilled. Our situation is like Vladimir's in Beckett's play:

“Well I suppose in the end I’ll get up by myself. [*He tries, fails*.] In the fullness of time.” We may still somehow expect this “fullness of time” to arrive but we also no longer believe it will really happen.

Whoever has seen the end of Rainer Werner Fassbinder’s *Die Ehe der Maria Braun* knows that the first illusion of the German postwar period concerning the arrival of “the fullness of time” relates, ironically, to a soccer game. I was just six years and three weeks old when, on July 4, 1954, I listened, with my parents and some of their friends, to the Soccer World Cup Final on the radio. Sensationally, Germany beat the clearly superior Hungarian team by the score of 3:2. In Fassbinder’s film, the triumphant shouting of Herbert Zimmermann, the radio announcer—“Over, over, over, Germany is World Champion!” (*Aus, aus, aus, Deutschland ist Weltmeister!*)—coincides with an explosion. The explosion destroys the villa that symbolizes the fortune Maria Braun has amassed by hard work and ruthless exploitation since the war, where she had hoped to lead a contented life with her husband after his release from jail.

In my family’s new two bedroom-apartment, Zimmermann’s voice—like a military order—made the grown-ups stand and sing a solemn tune I had never heard before. It was probably the first stanza of the German national anthem, whose chauvinistic words (*Deutschland, Deutschland ueber alles, ueber alles in der Welt*) had been banned by law from the public sphere. My vague but certain impression that something important had changed was confirmed by the self-congratulatory slogan of the German mid-1950s: “We’re somebody again” (*Wir sind wieder wer*). But while the social respectability based on soccer, combined with the notorious “miracle” of the German economy, helped the country to forget what it was not able to recall, it by no means brought postwar latency to an end.

A decade and a half later, the strangely immobile *Stimmung* of postwar latency would transform into aggressive interrogation and accusation of the older generation during the so-called “student revolt” that occurred around 1968 throughout the Western world (and perhaps not just there). In many different nations, my generation believed that a relentless documentation of the crimes committed during the earlier decades of the twentieth century—above all, those committed by one’s own parents and ancestors—would free us from a claustrophobic and hypocritical atmosphere. For a brief spell, 1968 indeed produced the mild surface effect of a cultural revolution, with greater historical transparency, a higher degree of social solidarity, and a

perhaps overly generous ideological tolerance vis-à-vis the socialist states on the other side of the "Iron Curtain." Ultimately, however, we stumbled into another period of quietly peaceful latency, grotesquely unable to cope with the violent terrorism to which what was left of our own leftism resorted some ten years later. Then, two decades later, when the Cold War seemed ready to transform into an almost harmonious "peaceful coexistence" between Socialism and Capitalism, the implosion of State Socialism in 1989 caught us by surprise and forced us to acknowledge that the finish line of the postwar had moved yet again. Like Vladimir and Estragon, we had been moving the whole time without making any progress, without leaving the past behind us. The postwar seemed never-ending.

. . .

As indicated, the final chapter of this book will return, in greater detail and with more analytic insistence, to all these (and other) moments of historical condensation, when we thought that the postwar was over. Today, at the book's beginning—I am writing these lines in Paris on March 20, 2010—the main questions that motivate me are raw and undifferentiated, somehow, and they have only become more urgent during the decades that have provided no answers. They are twofold: Will it ever be possible to draw a line that definitively separates us from post-World War II latency? Is the difficulty we have experienced while trying to do so, which has become the fate of my generation, specific to "our" historical time or is it, instead, a general problem facing all cultures and periods whenever they try to leave "their" past behind?

We are long used to it, yet, remarkably, there are more than just traces left of World War II—sixty-five years after the Axis powers' unconditional surrender. Russia and the People's Republic of China, for example, are no longer thoroughly communist but they are still "the other" of the former Western bloc. If the United States of America never fully learned how to play the role of a hegemonic power it assumed during the final years of the Second World War, now the country is struggling to transcend the very identity it never was entirely able to embrace. French historians and French generals still debate how their museums and *lieux de mémoire* should stage and narrate, for the younger generations and for tourists from all over the

world, the years between 1940 and 1945, when their nation suffered defeat yet emerged victorious. And while there seem to be very few facts left to unearth about the Holocaust—when mankind's essence was revealed in the most extreme way—a film like Quentin Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds* can still give millions of viewers sleepless nights by forcing them to consider whether understanding, forgiveness, and reconciliation—the working-through of history without violent retaliation—will ever be enough to leave the past behind, for ourselves and our children and our grandchildren. Something about that past and how it became part of our present will not come to rest. Any attempt to find a solution must begin by pinpointing what that "something" might be.

For a number of reasons, this book will not try to provide any such "solution." In the first place because, however we define "solution," it is impossible to avoid hints of the "ethical" or the "edifying," even—and these are dimensions of writing and thinking with which I, personally, have never felt comfortable. (Nor do I believe that the academic Humanities occupy a position that makes reflections of this kind particularly insightful or binding.) Secondly, such "solutions," if they are possible at all, would come too late for my generation. The inability to find a stable relationship with the past we have inherited has, I believe, been the story of our lives, and we do not have enough future left to free ourselves from this fate. Finally—and above all—I think the only more-or-less realistic goal lies in the step made prior to any "solution"; which means, in this context, describing the decade following the end of the Second World War to see how the *Stimmung* of latency emerged, spread, and, perhaps, transformed over time. If it did not sound too pretentious, I would say that this project, which is both modest and immoderately ambitious, represents an "existential" need on my part. The work it involves has benefited from aspects of my academic and professional activities, even if most connections of this kind are somewhat random—of secondary importance, at most. It is not my aim to develop, illustrate, or apply any "theories" (let alone "methods"), however much I may have drawn—and depended—on the thoughts of predecessors, colleagues, and students in working through this vital matter.

CHAPTER 2
FORMS OF LATENCY

A certain tension pervades the concept of “emergent latency” I employed, in an opening gesture, to make present the years following World War II. One tends, for etymological reasons that seem strangely inevitable, to relate “emergency” to spontaneous movement upward—as when a submerged piece of wood rises to the surface as soon as nothing more holds it down. On an almost visceral level, we may likewise remark that states of “latency” involve downward movement, as in the case of something falling by the wayside and lying unnoticed until its presence is felt. Strictly speaking, then, what “emerged” after 1945 cannot really be called “latency” because latency is not associated with upward movement. All the same, we can describe it as a *Stimmung*—that is, both an all-embracing atmosphere and a subjectively experienced mood. Calling *Stimmungen* to mind can give us retrospective certainty that something neglected or overlooked—or even lost altogether—made a decisive impact on life at a given moment in history and formed part of each subsequent present from that time on.

Among intellectuals after the Second World War, such impressions—which concerned the unclear difference between what they had expected their present to become and what this present actually turned out to be—were quite common. In an essay modestly entitled “The End of the War” (*La fin de la guerre*) that appeared in the October 1945 issue of *Les Temps modernes* (a journal he edited), Jean-Paul Sartre remarked the chiastic relationship between degrees of “cruelty” experienced in the two World Wars, on the one hand, and, on the other, the diametrically opposed scale of how events were remembered: “Aussi semble-t-il que cette guerre, qui fut beaucoup plus atroce que la précédente, ait laissé de moins mauvais souvenirs (“It seems that this war, which was more atrocious by far than the previous one, has left fewer bad memories”). Elaborating on his observation, Sartre states that he considers the second conflict “less stupid,” because it occurred for a reasonable purpose. Curiously, however, he declines to give the explanation until later. The passage in question reads as follows:

> Peut-être parce qu'on a cru longtemps qu'elle (sc. la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale) était moins stupide. Il ne paraissait pas stupide de se battre contre l'impérialisme allemand, de résister à l'armée de l'occupation. Aujourd'hui seulement on s'aperçoit que Mussolini, Hitler, Hiro-Hito n'étaient que des roiteles. Ces puissances de rapine et de sang qui se jetaient sur les démocraties, c'étaient de loin les nations les plus faibles. Les roiteles sont morts et déchus, leur petites principautés féodales, Allemagne, Italie, Japon, sont à terre. Le monde est simplifié: deux géants se dressent, seuls, et ne se regardent pas d'un bon oeil. Mais il faudra quelque temps avant que cette guerre-ci ne révèle son vrai visage (*Situations III*, 52)

> Perhaps it was because we believed for a long time that it (i.e. the Second World War) was less stupid. It did not seem stupid to fight against German imperialism and to resist the army of occupation. Only today are we beginning to realize that Mussolini, Hitler, and Hirohito were small-scale tyrants. The looting, bloody states that threw themselves at the democracies were by far the weakest nations. The petty tyrants are dead and beaten, and their feudal territories—Germany, Italy, Japan—lie on the floor. The world has become simpler: two giants are emerging, and there is no love lost between them. Still, it will take some time before this war shows its true face.

When I first read this passage, I was struck by the convergence—at more than six-and-a-half decades of distance—between Sartre's sense that the Second World War had not yet shown its "true face" (even as the Cold War was brewing), and my own thesis, today, that we still do not know how to relate to this event. If Sartre expected a cogent reaction and response to be formulated within a few months' time, we can say that what appeared to him as a short-term situation of latency has now turned into a state that humanity must bear—indeed, it may never vanish at all. As still happens in the twenty-first century, Sartre points to the atom bomb in order to identify "latent" conditions that, while unconcealed, one never manages to acknowledge fully:

> Plus d'un Européen eût préféré que le Japon fût envahi, écrasé sous les bombardements de la flotte: mais cette petite bombe qui peut tuer cent mille homes d'un coup et qui, demain, en tuera deux millions, elle nous met tout à coup en face de nos responsabilités. A la prochaine, la terre peut sauter: cette fin absurde laisserait en suspens pour toujours les problèmes qui font depuis dix mille ans nos soucis. (. . .) Nous voilà pourtant revenus à l'An Mille, chaque matin nous serons à la veille de la fin des temps; à la veille du jour où notre honnêteté, notre courage, notre bonne volonté n'auront plus de sens pour personne, s'abîmeront de pair avec la méchanceté, la mauvaise volonté, la peur d'une indistinction radicale. Après la mort de Dieu, voici qu'on annonce la mort de l'homme. (52)

> Many Europeans would have preferred to see Japan invaded and broken under navy bombardments: but this small bomb that can kill a hundred thousand people at a single stroke obliges us all to face our responsibility. Next time, it is possible that the planet will explode: such an absurd ending would leave forever unresolved the problems that have preoccupied us for the past ten thousand years (. . .). We have somehow returned to the year Thousand; every morning we face the end of time—the day our honesty, our courage, and our good intentions will no longer make sense to anyone; they will collapse along with our malice, our bad will, and our fear of a radical lack of difference and distinction. After the death of God, it is now time to announce the death of Man.

Significantly, the wording of the passage is not such that Sartre himself announces the "death of Man." As if frightened by the final consequence of his own analysis, Sartre takes rhetorical distance by stating, impersonally, "it is now time to. . . ." It must have been too much for him when he realized, for the first time, that one now had to live, forever, with the possibility that mankind would destroy itself by technological means. Anyone who has seen the series of photographs in *Viewfinder Clouded with Tears*, shot at Hiroshima half an hour after the bomb detonated, will understand the impulse behind Sartre's hesitation. The desperately serene faces (is this the freedom of those who know they have nothing left to lose?) and the bodies of the survivors stand in breach of what we can accept as "human." Today, however, we have grown strangely accustomed to the feeling: numerous symptoms of the "end of Man" have become permanent —almost popular—points of reference; when we speak of them, we look upon them from the outside instead of assuming responsibility and asking how they first came to be or what consequences they hold. As Sartre predicted, we experience the threat of mankind's self-extinction in the abstract, only too glad to let it fade from our minds.

In contrast, we feel confident in describing the objective form that the condition of latency (not, n.b., the latent "itself") assumes in specific *Stimmungen*. A *Stimmung*, as I argued above, combines certain configurations of knowledge with the sensation that we are both involved in, and influenced by, the material world that surrounds us. In all permutations of this ontologically strange amalgamation—which one may call *topoi*, if one stresses the spatial connotations of the term bequeathed to us by rhetorical tradition—distinct desires are produced, as well as, often enough, certain feelings of resistance accompanying the fulfillment of the same desires. *Stimmungen* emerge both in reaction to, and as a consequence of, latency; at the same time, they actively preserve what is latent—what is there, but not in view. In the next three chapters, I will describe three configurations of *topoi* that, in my estimation, represent results of, or reactions to, the situation of latency as it emerged specifically after the Second World War; at the same time, these very configurations must have functioned as a means of keeping what was/is latent under cover and at a distance. To illustrate the three configurations, I will use documents from a wide range of languages and cultures—including countries that did not participate in the Second World War—since I believe that, after 1945, the

condition of latency and the attendant *Stimmung* have become “global” in nature (“global” *avant la lettre*, of course). I should stress that these *topoi* and their mode of interrelation were identified by purely inductive means in the course of extensive readings and intense seminar discussions. As I recall, the process was never influenced or shaped by a particular “philosophy of history” or fashionable “theory.”

For most of the *topoi* that permit us to experience and contemplate the forms of *Stimmung* after 1945, I will metonymically refer to key texts from the decade following the war—texts in which the characteristic *Stimmung* appears in a particularly pronounced and imposing way. It is not by chance, I assume, that some of these documents—at least in their native contexts—have become highly emblematic, if not “classical.” The first of the three configurations combines the claustrophobic feeling of being locked into a space that has “no exit” with the opposing, yet complementary obsession of being outside a space that offers “no entry.” The three principal characters in Sartre’s *Huis clos*, for example, need considerable time to realize fully that they will never be able to leave the space they occupy; ultimately, they learn that even a door standing open to the outside will not change their condition. The border between the inside they inhabit and the outside denied to them becomes an ever-receding horizon—a threshold, that is, which produces skepticism about whether an outside really exists at all. In contrast, Private Beckmann (*Gefreiter* Beckmann)—the soldier returning late from the war in Wolfgang Borchert’s *Draussen vor der Tür* (literally, “Outside, in front of the door”)—tries, multiple times and in different ways, to gain entry into the society emerging in a world finally at peace; he only encounters closed doors, gestures of rejection, and a lack of assistance. At one point, Beckmann refuses to share his bed with a woman whose husband is still missing in action—thereby, he enacts (and bodily, at that) the fate he suffers upon someone who shares his exact position. It seems no alternative exists between being rejected or being the agent of rejection. From both perspectives within this configuration—from the standpoint of Sartre’s protagonists and Beckmann’s, too—a certain space, outside the world inhabited at present and about which little is known, provides an object of desire. In either case, the desired space transforms into a space of latency.

In the second cluster of *topoi*, the matter of “bad faith”—an item of central concern to the philosophy of the time—connects with the choreography of, and rules governing, certain rituals of interrogation. Once

again, we turn to the works of Jean-Paul Sartre. The second chapter of the philosopher's massive masterpiece, *L'ètre et le néant* (*Being and Nothingness*), takes, as a point of departure, the description of everyday situations pervaded by bad faith, and draws from them consequences on the scale of a system, which demolish the foundations of philosophy reliant on the shape and the structure of the Cartesian Subject. Full self-transparency, according to Sartre, is an illusion to which we fall prey all too often. In reality, we can never know entirely what we want to achieve or what we mean to say—which implies that outright lies are impossible. An outright lie would completely negate what we want to say or achieve—and such a point of reference is unavailable to us. Literature of the period after the Second World War abounds in biographical and autobiographical narratives in which the protagonists—in a variety of ways—achieve or "embody," textually, this very state. As concretizations of a philosophical *topos* that is historically specific, the stories intersect with narratives and projects that feature aggressive procedures of investigation—processes that try to bring hidden or latent truths to the fore. Thus, in William Faulkner's *Requiem for a Nun*, a relative of the main character (who is a young woman from the upper classes of the American South) refuses to abandon his professional role as a judge even in the most private of settings. Thereby, he forces the heroine to confront a shocking past that she believes she has put behind her. Likewise—albeit with the methods supplied by the contemporary social sciences—Alfred Kinsey's famous *Report* tries to penetrate—and map, with endless charts and graphs—dimensions of our psyche and memory to which, according to Sartre, full transparency is denied. The second configuration of *topoi*, then, confronts different forms of desire for knowledge with obstacles and problems that self-understanding faces. The *Kinsey Report* (the first installment of which appeared in 1948) met with enthusiasm and, alternately, provoked scandal. Today, we can understand it as an early step towards the insight that sexual life is impossible without zones of latency.

Finally, in the third configuration of *topoi* that shape the *Stimmung* after the Second World War, authors and literary personages discover how their present differs from what it had been predicted to be when it was still the future of the past. Here, we discover a convergence between the experience of disappointment and the dream for calm within a narrow, well-defined space—an existential situation that I dub the "container." Initially, the third

configuration may seem more difficult to grasp than the two others. This specific intersection of *topoi* was facilitated by the feeling that the long-awaited (and greatly desired) future had failed to come—a sensation that provoked disorientation and existential malaise. Much of Pier Paolo Pasolini's poetry after the war displays fascination with the experience that Marxist prophecies—which had grown popular as Italy was being freed from Fascism—had not gone into fulfillment; consequently, the future was left open and precarious. In a variation on the same theme, Boris Pasternak's novel *Doctor Zhivago* concludes with a conversation between two characters. Looking down over the cityscape of late Stalinist Moscow, they agree in the judgment (which represents a revised historical expectation) that Communism will prevail, even if the course of its development and precise date of arrival have proven more fraught (and contested) than anticipated.

By the late 1940s, not much (if anything) was left over from the early-twentieth and nineteenth centuries, when the future was full of glorious promise—be it, more specifically, the promise of capitalist progress or that of socialist teleology. Although such images of happiness had not disappeared completely, now they began to look much more vague and unsteady. Coupled with the massive depreciation in the value attached to human life that occurred through the horrors of war, the experience must have provoked dreams of eternal rest—as occurs, for example, in the image of the "bed in heaven" in some of Paul Celan's texts, or when the great Brazilian poet João Cabral de Melo Neto displays a fascination for graves as protected spaces. The only unequivocally positive condition for life seemed to lie in the redemption promised by the eternal sleep of death.

The three configurations to be explored in detail are dominated by effects of exclusion and non-fulfillment. What had seemed entirely within reach in the many illusions of human agency (both individual and collective) that prevailed during the first half of the twentieth century, was now slowly but steadily beginning to appear remote and frozen in memories with less and less energy to keep them alive. In objective terms, postwar conditions of existence had improved for hundreds of millions of people; at the same time, however, the previously luminous horizon had dimmed, and life had lost much of its intensity. Mankind—understood as a historical process—was increasingly paralyzed by unseen restrictions that, it seemed, would not let go. It is this situation—the slow, almost imperceptible process that has

occurred over the past seven decades—that I wish to describe. Although the pace of our activities and inventions may have accelerated, we can no longer be certain whether we will pass into the threshold of futurity.

The closing chapter analyzes moments in time and historical events that, when they first occurred, seemed to make or unmake the world (for example, the youth revolt of 1968, the implosion of State Socialism in 1989, or September 11, 2001). Now, they are becoming, as we look back on them, part of an ever-broadening present above which we can no longer seriously hope to rise. Time—today and for us—seems to reveal a new structure and to unfold in a rhythm that is different from the "historical" time that governed the nineteenth- and the early-twentieth centuries. In this new chronotope—for which no name exists yet, even though we live within its forms—agency, certainty, and the historical progress of mankind have faded into distant memory. We are left only with unredeemed desire, uncertainty, and disorientation. At the same time, a future that we never chose threatens us. There is neither escape, nor much of an idea where we stand at this point—or even where we should be. That is, there is no reason to believe that what has been latent for so long might now, finally, begin "to show its face."

CHAPTER 3

NO EXIT AND NO ENTRY

The “pocket battleship” *Graf Spee* first touched water on October 1, 1932—barely four months before Adolf Hitler’s National Socialist Party officially rose to power—and was launched on June 30, 1934. She took her name from Admiral Graf Maximilian von Spee, who had died on December 8, 1914, with two of his sons in the first battle of the Falkland Islands. After international monitoring duties off the Iberian coast during the Spanish Civil War, the ship was sent on September 26, 1939—almost as soon as the Second World War erupted—into the Atlantic as a commerce raider, where she sank nine Allied merchant ships. She became such a menace, in part, because of the advanced technology on board: the *Graf Spee* was the first vessel of the German *Kriegsmarine* to be equipped with *Seetakt* radar. However, credit should also go to Captain Hans Langsdorff, a veteran of World War I who assumed command November 1, 1938. Langsdorff adhered strictly to the rules of mercantile warfare, saving the lives of the three hundred and three sailors on board the ships that he sank. (Later, in neutral Norwegian waters, a British destroyer freed the prisoners by force from the German tanker *Altmark*). Many of the men regarded Langsdorff highly; he spoke perfect English and gave some of them English books to help the time pass.

Eight hunting groups—a total of twenty-five ships (mostly British)—were deployed to find the *Graf Spee*. On December 13, 1939—the middle of summer in the Southern hemisphere—the seventh of these flotillas sighted her off the Argentine-Uruguayan coast. Early in the ensuing battle, an eight-inch shell penetrated two of her decks and caused crippling damage to the funnel area. *Graf Spee* was forced to dock for repairs at the port of Montevideo (which was officially neutral, but in fact pro-Ally). Under the Hague Convention of 1907, the ship had seventy-two hours before she would have to depart. The corpses of more than thirty crewmen received burial with military honors at the German cemetery in Montevideo. Meanwhile, Langsdorff received the order, from Adolf Hitler himself, “to fight his way through to Buenos Aires, using remaining

ammunition.” The *Graf Spee* left the harbor of Montevideo at 6.15 p.m., December 17, 1939; three British battleships were waiting to engage her in international waters. Just outside port, she was scuttled at 7.52 p.m. in shallow waters—a decision that probably saved many lives. Three days later—wrapped in the flag of the German Empire (which was different from the swastika-bearing flag of the Nazis)—Langsdorff shot himself. In a clever ploy, the approximately thousand sailors on the *Graf Spee* were set adrift in the Rio de la Plata, where three Argentine flag vessels under local German ownership recovered them. Some of the wounded crewmen were held at Montevideo; later, they decided to remain. After the end of the war—in February 1946—an operation was undertaken to repatriate by force the more than eight hundred Germans still in Buenos Aires. By then, most of them wished to stay in South America. They were able to do so thanks to the intervention of the Argentine Navy, which provided them with the proper identity documents at the last moment.

After the scuttling, much of the *Graf Spee’*s superstructure remained above water. Over the course of many years, the wreck progressively disappeared. Today, only the top of the mast can be seen, close to the surface. Since the wreck poses a hazard for navigation, an attempt was made in February 2004 to salvage it. Efforts were halted by Uruguayan presidential decree in 2009. Along with the descendants of the *Graf Spee’*s crewmen still living in Argentina and Uruguay, the mast of the ship and the parts that were raised from the deep preserve—in a state of latency—an early episode of World War II that fascinated the mid-twentieth century. Or, to be more precise: some material remainders of the episode are still present and visible, yet it is very unlikely that we would ever recognize them on our own. The story of the *Graf Spee* concerns the claustrophobic feeling of being unable to leave Montevideo and the Rio de la Plata. Additionally, it involves Captain Langsdorff’s refusal to fully join the military under Nazi control, as well as the former crew’s unwillingness to leave the Rio de la Plata. During the funeral ceremony at Montevideo on December 15, Langsdorff had made the traditional naval salute, even as those around him raised their arms in the *Hitlergruß*. All the same, we will never know for certain what motivated his last action as a naval commander.

. . .

The story of the *Graf Spee*, from early in the war—which tells of being unable to go off, yet not wanting to go in—anticipates and condenses, like an allegory, one dimension of the *Stimmung* that emerged during the final years of the conflict, a mood that would dominate the world after the fighting had ended. *Huis clos*—a drama by thirty-eight-year-old Jean-Paul Sartre first produced in occupied Paris at *Le Vieux Colombier* in May 1944, only a few days before the Allies landed in Normandy—staged the impossibility of leaving a particular space and a basic existential situation. Three people—Inès, Estelle, and a man who goes by the name "Garcin" even though he appears to be middle-aged—meet in a salon decorated with the heavy furniture of the mid-nineteenth century. The room has no windows and no mirrors: not only are the characters incapable of looking outside, they also cannot see themselves; this state of affairs seems to make them more sensitive—vulnerable, even—to the gaze of the others. Estelle, Garcin, and Inès know right from the start—and, therefore, they speak freely—that their lives have ended. The room and the situation in which they find themselves is hellish. What makes the space a hell for them is the fact that they must live forever in the presence of others and their gazes. "The executioner—that is, each of us for the two others," says Inès. She is a lesbian who desires Estelle, who in turn wants to be loved by Garcin—which makes Inès jealous. Inès has her revenge simply because Estelle and Garcin cannot make love without being exposed to her watchful eye. No action or decision by Inès is required to embarrass and frustrate Estelle and Garcin. It is part of the situation, Garcin is first to discover, that the occupants of the room have no eyelids. Visual contact with the surrounding world cannot be interrupted—a condition that is, in a different way, normal in life: "You don't even know how refreshing this was. Four thousand moments of rest during one hour. Four thousand short moments of escape. And when I say four thousand . . . Well? I shall live without eyelids? Don't be stupid. Without eyelids, without sleep, it's the same thing. I will never sleep again . . . But how will I be able to bear myself?" (18). Without lids, eyes cannot even shed tears.

In this closed space without windows, there is also no difference between day and night. To make matters worse, Estelle, Garcin, and Inès cannot even switch off the light; everything is arranged to heighten the aggressive power of the others' gazes. The only surprise offered by the plot of *Huis clos*, apart from the ever-intensifying sensation of claustrophobia, comes

towards the end. Garcin beats his fists against the door. It seems he does so in vain—until the door suddenly and unexpectedly opens:

> ESTELLE: (. . .) when this door opens, I will escape.
>
> INÈS: Where to?
>
> ESTELLE: It does not matter where. As far away as possible.
>
> *Garcin has not stopped banging against the door*.
>
> GARCIN: Open! Open finally! I will accept whatever it takes: pincers, melted lead, gags. Everything that burns, everything that rips me apart, I want to suffer with my body. I'd rather have a hundred wounds, whips, poisons—than this kind of suffering in the head, this phantom of suffering, which touches me softly and caresses me without ever really hurting (*He seizes the door knob and tries to turn it*). Will you open? (*The door opens all of a sudden, and he almost falls to the ground*). Yes! *A long silence*.
>
> INÈS: And now, Garcin? Go ahead and leave.
>
> GARCIN, *slowly*: I wonder why this door opened.
>
> INÈS: What are you waiting for? Go, go quickly.
>
> GARCIN: I will not go.
>
> INÈS: And you, Estelle? (*Estelle does not move; Inès breaks out into laughter*). And now? Who? Who of the three? The way lies open, who's holding us back? The laughter's killing me! We are inseparable. (86f.)

Interpreted along sociological lines, the scene suggests that the three characters have interiorized their situation, which has become "second nature" to them. Taking a psychoanalytic point of view, on the other hand, one might say that, without knowing it, the three have become enamored of their own suffering. Perhaps, however, we need not ask at all what the scene "means." We can simply observe that the type of claustrophobia here does not depend on specific material conditions of containment. Instead, it involves the incapacity of the three dead people to cross the threshold separating them from an outside world that they long for—especially when their relationship experiences tension. Or might it be that there no outside exists at all?

A film by Luis Buñuel produced in Mexico presents a similar scenario. *El Angel exterminador* (1962) concerns a wealthy couple who invite a group of friends to their lavish home after an evening at the Opera. After many drinks and as much inane conversation, the guests discover, in the early morning hours, that they cannot leave, even though the doors are open. Consequently, they must remain together for several days, disconnected from the outside world and everyday routines. Over time, guests and hosts alike lose all traces of decorum. At the end, they have even abandoned most of the patterns of behavior we call "human." The civil

authorities try to penetrate the estate from outside, but the attempts fail—until, as if by magic, a flock of sheep and lambs makes its way inside. The party slaughters and eats some of the animals. All of a sudden, they can depart. Here, too, there is no point to ask what the "meaning" is—to ask how the spell has been cast and what then makes it vanish. Buñuel's film simply *is* about the feeling of being confined in a narrow space without any physical barriers. In this respect, *El Angel exterminador* presents a situation no different from the one faced by Samuel Beckett's Estragon and Vladimir in *Waiting for Godot*. Here, too, the characters cannot depart from the place where they happen to find themselves:

> ESTRAGON: Let's go.
>
> VLADIMIR: We can't.
>
> ESTRAGON: Why not?
>
> VLADIMIR: We are waiting for Godot.
>
> ESTRAGON: Ah! (96)

They do not know who Godot is, or even what he might look like. Most likely, they would not recognize him if he did show up. But they do not even know whether he will ever come. Godot "incarnates" the immaterial condition of their not being able to leave. When texts like *Waiting for Godot* or *Huis clos* first appeared, readers were especially intrigued by the different reasons (whether apparent or hidden) that made it impossible for characters to break out from where they were. They were excited to discover that the gaze of others or the absence of God offered possible sources of existential torture. Looking back today, in contrast, what strikes us most is the sheer obsession with confinement the plays present.

. . .

Wolfgang Borchert's only drama, *Draussen vor der Tür* (*Outside, in Front of the Door*), was first staged in Hamburg, November 21, 1947, one day after the author, at the age of twenty-six, died in a Basel hospital. Nine months earlier, when it was produced for radio, the play had already produced an intense reaction in Germany. Up to the 1960s—and even the early 1970s—*Draussen vor der Tür* was considered a classic of the theater. In literature classes, it was deemed an exemplary text of the postwar period. Today, Borchert and his work are largely forgotten outside the professional

world of literary historians. Borchert had been one of the few German intellectuals of his generation who openly provoked the National Socialist regime in his writings and cabaret performances; for this reason, he had spent more time in court and in jail than at the front. From 1942 on, the author had suffered from jaundice. Rather than a specific injury or disease, all-consuming physical exhaustion caused his premature death.

Viewed from this angle, Private Beckmann (*Gefreiter* Beckmann)—the protagonist of *Draussen vor der Tür*—is not really an autobiographical figure. Beckmann returns from the front (or perhaps from imprisonment, like hundreds of thousands of young German men after the war), whereas Borchert managed to escape from a French jail on German territory before fighting ceased (walking six hundred kilometers, through embattled terrain, to arrive in his native Hamburg on May 10, 1945, two days after Germany's unconditional surrender). Friends took care of Borchert—even financing his train ride to Switzerland, where he received medical treatment and died. Private Beckmann, on the other hand, finds that all doors have been closed to him—as they were for so many soldiers returning from combat.

If Sartre's protagonists cannot leave their *salon*, even when the doors open wide, Beckmann is never allowed to enter any space or existential situation that would offer him warmth, shelter, or rest. To coin a term, he experiences unfulfilled "claustrophilia." Always wearing the dark glasses that were supposed to protect against gas attacks, Beckmann describes, to an amputated comrade, what lies at the heart of his experience:

> This is exactly what, yesterday night, I asked the man who was with my wife. In my own shirt he was there. In my own bed. What are you doing here? I asked. He lifted his shoulders and let them fall again and said: Well what am I doing here. . . . That's what he answered. So I closed the bedroom door again—no, first I switched off the light. And then I stood outside. (20)

Beckmann goes to his parents' home, only to learn from the woman who now inhabits the apartment that, succumbing to the pressure that now weighs on supporters of the Nazis, they killed themselves with gas from the stove: "One morning, they were lying stiff and blue in the kitchen. What a waste, says my husband: with that much gas, we could have cooked for an entire month." At the end of the conversation, Beckmann himself urges the woman to close the door in front of him. His commander from the war, a colonel, finds Beckmann funny and advises him to pursue a stage career. The director of the theater tells him to come back once he has gained more life experience and become star material: "All doors are closed. They are

only open for Shirley Temple or for the boxing champion Max Schmeling." God is an old man who knows—because he cannot change anything—that no one will trust him anymore. Death, on the other hand, enjoys such success that his allegorical figure "has gained some weight." Yet Death rejects Beckmann, too. When he tries to drown himself in the Elbe, the river spits him out:

> Look for another bed if yours is occupied. I don't want the miserable little bit of your life. You're just not enough for me, my boy. First, you have to live. Kick ass, and let yourself be ass-kicked. One day, when you're totally drunk, up to the top, when you're paralyzed, struggling to move and lying in the mud, then we can talk again. But for now, get real, ok? And now your clear the premises, my darling boy. Your little handful of life is not fucking enough. Keep it. I don't want it. (12)

On a non-allegorical level—or a less allegorical one, at any rate—it is not the river that saves Beckmann's life by rejecting him, but a young girl who drags out his cold body. She wants to take him home—so badly that she seems to possess the power of resurrection:

> GIRL: Oh, then we would go home together, to my home. Yes, be alive again, my little cold fish! For me. With me. Come, let us be alive together.
>
> BECKMANN: Shall I live? You were really looking for me?
>
> GIRL: The whole time. You! And only you. The whole time, only you. Why are you dead, poor gray phantom? Do you not want to be alive with me?
>
> BECKMANN: Yes, yes, yes. I'll go with you. I want to be alive with you! (56)

The final scene suggests that the girl who has saved Beckmann is the wife of his amputated companion. Rejection from his own wife and at the door of his parents' house finally triggers a sequence of actions in which Beckmann imposes a similar fate upon those who share his fate. The amputated companion who, unlike Beckmann, *did* manage to kill himself, now calls Beckmann a murderer. The accusation makes his role palpably double. Beckmann cannot come home, but must stay outside, in front of the door, because another man has taken his spot in bed, next to his wife. At the same time, however, *he* now occupies his comrade's place in bed alongside the second man's wife. As it dawns upon him that the situation offers no way out, Beckmann realizes that yet another door remains closed to him. This door is represented by suicide, the entryway of death—the only thing that can prevent him from killing others: "Don't I have a right to end my life? Will I just go on killing and killing? Where will I go? How should I live? With whom? What for? Where will we go in this world?"

Whether we take “this world” to refer to the world of the drama, the world of Private Beckmann or, perhaps, the world of Wolfgang Borchert, the obvious conclusion is that “this world” offers no place free of guilt. Whereas in *Huis clos* it is someone else’s penetrating gaze that makes the presence of the other unbearable, in *Draussen vor der Tür* it is simply our physical presence that always—and inevitably—deprives the other of space (a circumstance that, incidentally, corresponds exactly to the everyday life of many Germans in the years following the war). Only when present as a voice does the physical other occupy no space. In the concluding monologue, instead of trying to escape the social dimension of life, Beckmann longs for the other’s response—for a sign of his presence (whereby “his” presupposes that the other whom he addresses is the male other whose space he has taken when he sleeps with his wife). Beckmann has learned that his existence is not that of innocence victimized, but of victimhood that turns others into victims, too:

> Where are you, Other? Are you not otherwise always here?
>
> Where are you now, Yeasayer? Answer me now! Now I need you, for you to respond! But where are you? Suddenly, you are no longer there! Where are you, where are you, who did not want to permit me the exit of death? Where is the old man whose name is God?
>
> Answer me, if you will!
>
> Why are you all silent? Why?
>
> So, nobody answers?
>
> Nobody answers???
>
> So there is nobody, then, nobody to give an answer? (59)

Taken together, Sartre’s and Borchert’s postwar dramas give us the feeling that nothing can ever be naturally good or free of conflict among humans. The characters will always feel penetrated—or excluded—by the presence of others; by the same token, they must learn that it is impossible for them not to have the same effect on others. The obsessive intensity with which sensations of space give form to this condition in the years following 1945 is not just metaphorical. Rather, it suggests that, at this historical moment, what is wrong about one’s relationship with others is always, at least in part, also a kind of physical defect: it produces bodily pain and, through the body, an experience of afflicted space. This condition, in its complexity, rouses a longing for redemption inasmuch as it awakens a dream—or even a memory—that things might be different, indeed that they were different, and that, one day, they might change again and be “good.” But this—other—world remains latent, for it only exists, vaguely, in the desire that circumstances will change.

. . .

Despair at being unable to exit and despair at being unable to enter, which have provided the focus for our discussion of Sartre's *Huis clos* and Borchert's *Draussen vor der Tür*, are omnipresent in texts from the decade that followed World War II—and not just in works written in lands that participated in military action. We begin to understand, then—at least in the particular constellation of that time—how the two *topoi* (once again, taking *topoi* to designate, at least in part, "spaces" and "forms of space" in the literal sense) are more difficult to differentiate than one may first imagine. The same holds true, as we have seen, for distinctions between agency/aggression, on the one hand, and victimhood, on the other. Of course, as dimensions of experience, they are not identical at all, nor is their relationship characterized by oscillation or instability. Instead—and rather like Hegel's description of the "master/slave dialectic"—there is hardly a condition of victimhood that does not, in the long run, reveal aggression (and vice versa). Still, despite this profound connection, I would like to show—first in the case of "no exit," and then in the case of "no entry"—how these motifs pervaded all manner of texts composed to perform very different functions. In the process, we will achieve a fuller awareness both of the *topoi'*s asymmetry and of their inseparability.

The obsessive desire for an impossible exit often conflicts with the nightmare of an opening to the outside that is ever-receding, which, suddenly, can transform into a wish to remain inside. The most drastic and devastating escalation of the "no exit" motif occurs in a Spanish novel from 1962 that has never received the acclaim it deserves. The scene in question, from Luis Martín Santos' *Tiempo de silencio*, depicts a failed abortion that ends in death. The young woman—the girl who will die—is pregnant after having been raped—regularly and in the presence of the entire family—by her father. The father of both the mother and the child-to-be, without any embarrassment and with the support of the entire clan, tries to force the death and expulsion of the fetus at a very advanced stage of pregnancy:

> He had the short and round body of his spouse sit on his daughter's belly, supposing perhaps that he would thus satisfy both the physical requirements of gravity and those of decency; at the same time, he strapped a cord around the girl's body, starting at the level of her navel and pulling more strongly as he drew closer to her broad hips; once he gave up on the cord, which had left its mark on the girl's skin, he pressed and pulled her belly downward, with both hands, trying to force the delivery of all fetal material and of all urine that her body was holding; he had her drink very hot liquids concocted by secret recipes that burnt the neither-mother's-nor-virgin's roof of the mouth;

> he poured cold water on her belly and boiling hot water with a bit of mustard on her thighs; and finally, beginning to sweat a bit, he announced that he would pull "it" out with his hands, which turned out to be completely impossible (. . .).
>
> His spouse, in contrast, thought that it would be good to place between her daughter's legs a branch of fennel whose smell would attract the baby. (96)

The father of the pregnant girl happens to know a young doctor, whom he calls out of impatience rather than feelings of pity or responsibility. When the latter arrives, he readies his medical instruments, only to realize that he has come too late: whatever the uterus contains is already dead and will never leave the mother's body.

There is no way out into the open, and any attempt to leave "the inside" will prove lethal. This is the most dramatic of all the claustrophobic scenarios that haunt the postwar years. What surrounds, constitutes, and contains the inside may be frail—like the pregnant girl's body—still, it tenaciously remains, resisting all attempts to break through, out into the open. Moreover, the inside often engenders an unbearable atmosphere, which only invigorates the desire to leave—the desire to leave that has transformed into a need for survival. What holds true, as psychological reality, for the room in which Estelle, Inès, and Garcin can neither die nor close their eyes in Sartre's *Huis clos* has a spatial equivalent in the city Oran in Albert Camus' *La Peste*. Here, plague spreads and the citizens have no chance of escape:

> The moist warmth of this spring made people long for the heat of the summer. In the town that was built on the plain like a snail, with no opening towards the sea, a gray drabness prevailed. Within its long frail walls, along the streets whose shopping windows were full of dust, in the streetcars painted in a dirty yellow, they felt a bit like prisoners of the sky. Only Rieux' old patient was happy for this weather made his asthma smoother. (36)

Roberto Rossellini's *Germany Year Zero*, the final installment in his war trilogy, was shot in Berlin and Rome between September 1947 and January 1948. The film presents a similar situation in the temporal dimension. The father of two young adults and Edmund, the elder children's sensitive and precocious eleven-year-old brother, is exhausted from a life of resistance in Nazi Germany. His physical energy has vanished entirely, leaving no hope for recovery. The father is a permanent invalid unable to leave his bed, yet he cannot die, either. He knows only too well how much, and in how many different ways, he has become a burden to his children. Struck by the father's unbearable weakness—and spurred on, too, by ill-digested ideas concerning the "survival of the fittest" still in circulation—Edmund finally poisons him with uncanny coldness and decision. However, there is a price

to be paid for making the father pass over the border into death: the life of Edmund himself who, in the final scene of the film, commits suicide.

. . .

The dynamic opposed to containment is voiced with equal strength. In both literature and the real world, people do everything in their power to remain within circumscribed spaces, resisting forces from within and without that would make them cross the threshold towards the outside. As an ardent supporter of Nazism (whose motivations were less a matter of politics than unabashed, virulent anti-Semitism), the French novelist Louis-Ferdinand Céline left Paris in June 1945; after a short stay in Denmark, he spent the remaining months of the war in Germany, offering medical assistance to exiled members of the Vichy government. In March 1946, Céline returned to Denmark, where he used all the legal resources available to him to avoid extradition to France, where he had been accused of treason and faced a possible death sentence. In a letter (written in English) to his Danish lawyer dated February 12, 1946, Céline includes a previous missive to his wife, Lucette Destouches (Destouches was Céline's legal name). Here, he declares that he will under no circumstances hand himself over to the French legal system: "My little darling: With great concern I have seen that you find natural the idea of me going to France to let myself be sentenced. Under no bloody circumstances! I will not consent to any such proposal. I will hold on to the right of asylum like a devil! Like a Jew! No Jew who escaped to Denmark ever let himself be talked by friendly words into being judged by Hitler's Germany! No fucking way! My case is exactly the same! Of course the Danes would be delighted if I surrendered!" (799). After being tried in absentia by a military court—and subsequently pardoned as a veteran of World War I—Céline returned to France in 1951 and suffered no further ill effects. Ten years later, he died.

A complex legal situation made it possible for Céline to avoid extradition from Denmark—an event that would most likely have cost him his life. In William Faulkner's *Requiem for a Nun*, the defense lawyer Gavin Stevens is prompted by his strong sense of justice to stay on, stubbornly, at the house of his nephew Gowan and the latter's wife, Temple. The lengthy conversations meet with increasingly desperate—and intense—resistance on the part of the relatives. Stevens wishes to confirm—and by the end, he

will succeed in doing so—the suspicion, as unlikely as it sounds at first, that his African-American defendant, Nancy, killed the couple's infant daughter because—and for plausible reasons—she wished to protect their other child from the consequences of the mother's addictive erotic passions. The moral responsibility for the child's death, then, falls on the parents rather than Nancy (who was the baby's nurse).

Early in the story, it begins to dawn upon Gowan that his uncle's presence might jeopardize the scheme he has hatched with his wife to make Nancy die for the crime that they, the baby's parents, provoked (and for which, by extension, they bear responsibility). The lawyer disregards all the signs and hints his relatives make that, by the social conventions of a traditional Southern family, he should leave. As tension mounts, Gavin Stevens even pretends not to understand when Gowan alludes to Nancy's execution as his and Temple's "revenge." He thereby almost makes his nephew lose control:

> GOWAN: Drink up. After all, I've got to eat supper and do some packing too. How about it?
>
> STEVENS: About what? the packing, or the drink? What about you? I thought you were going to have one.
>
> GOWAN: Oh, sure, sure.
>
> (takes up a filled glass)
>
> Maybe you had better go and leave us to our revenge.
>
> STEVENS: I wish it could comfort you.
>
> GOWAN: I wish to God it could. I wish to God that what I wanted was only revenge. An eye for an eye—were ever words emptier? Only, you have got to have lost the eye to know it.
>
> STEVENS: Yet she still has to die.
>
> GOWAN: Why not? Even if she would be any loss—a nigger whore, a drunkard, a dope-fiend—
>
> STEVENS: a vagabond, a tramp, hopeless until one day Mr and Mrs Gowan Stevens out of simple pity and humanity picked her up of the gutter to give her one more chance—
>
> (Gowan stands motionless, his hand tightening slowly about the glass. Stevens watches him)
>
> And then in return for it—
>
> GOWAN: Look, Uncle Gavin. Why don't you go for God's sake home? Or to hell, or anywhere out of here?
>
> STEVENS: I am, in a minute. Is that why you think—why you would still say she has to die? (518f.)

There are thresholds in the postwar world that no one can cross in either direction, and there are characters who—mostly for legal reasons—resist the pressure to do so. There are also thresholds that, because they recede in permanence, cannot be crossed. *Paisan,* the second and longest installment in Rossellini's war trilogy, presents, in epic detail, the conquest of Italy by

American troops. Each advance of the American Army—from Sicily to the North of the Peninsula—only delays the arrival of victory, when Italy will finally be freed from German occupation. Until then, the Germans are in a protracted state of withdrawal, successfully avoiding all direct and potentially decisive confrontations. Likewise, in *Giant*—the third and last film starring James Dean—oil derricks progressively extend over the seemingly endless expanse of a Texas farm. They first sprout on the tiny, island-like property the young rebel owns, until, finally, they surround the house of the genteel local family that refuses to acknowledge and yield to the new, industrial age.

Sometimes, receding borders of this sort open up for an imperceptible moment and smoothly absorb the force that threatens to break them. In Rossellini's *Paisan*, the few remaining monks at a convent refuse to provide lodging for a rabbi who, together with a Catholic priest and a Protestant pastor, serves in the American army. Finally, instead of simply yielding to military force, they convince themselves that the law of universal hospitality—hospitality without exclusion—is their ethical obligation, and that fulfilling this obligation will only strengthen their Christian faith. In the early 1950s, Ernst Jünger and Martin Heidegger engaged in a discussion that followed, in detail and explicitly, this same logic of a receding line of demarcation that can, momentarily, open and transform what it contains. Their exchange concerned possible philosophical responses to what they described as the growing Nihilism in the twentieth century. Both interlocutors used the spatial concept of the "line" to present their respective answers to a question of mutual concern. If Jünger tends to affirm the need to keep nihilism at a distance, Heidegger, in contrast, proposes to work through the challenges it poses and, thereby, to make it part of his own existential situation:

> Therefore, a discussion of the "line" has to ask what the completion of Nihilism would possibly be. The answer seems to be obvious. Nihilism will be completed once it has occupied all dimensions and once it affirms itself everywhere, when nothing can claim to be the exception from Nihilism anymore, and it has thus become the state of normality. But this state of normality is but the *realization* of completion. Normality is a consequence of completion. Completion is the assembly of all the essential possibilities inherent to Nihilism, which are difficult for us to think through, both as a whole and in detail. We can only think the essential possibilities inherent to Nihilism if we return to its essence. And I say that we have to "return" because the essence of Nihilism precedes its individual manifestations. (IX/393)

By opening itself to what—at first—appears to threaten its very possibility, philosophy affirms its vigor. However, once Nihilism—that is, the potential

negation of philosophy—is thought all the way through, its threatening border—a "line" beyond which a lethal ending once seemed to lie waiting—is again displaced:

> And what does this mean for our anticipation of a crossing of the line? Is human existence already *trans lineam* or are we now but getting to the vast plain that lies before the line? Or could this be an inevitable delusion? Perhaps the line appears right before us as the threat of a planetary catastrophe? Who would then cross it? And what would such catastrophes do to us? The two World Wars have not slowed down the advance of Nihilism nor changed its direction (. . .): Where does the line now lie? Wherever it lies, this question should encourage discussion about whether we can dare to think the crossing of the line. (IX/394)

If one survives the worst and works through what one felt one had to escape or to turn away from, what appeared as the future of one's death may become part of one's life.

Such an experience of consolation emerges in the graceful pathos of the *Hiroshima Diary*, written between August 6 and September 30 by Michihiko Hachiya, a Japanese physician who, after surviving the first nuclear bomb, worked tirelessly, surrounded by material and physical destruction, to help those even more gravely affected by the catastrophe than himself. On September 29—one day before the last entry—Dr. Hachiya has the task of guiding "two young officers of the Occupation force" through the hospital. Besides the event of August 6, a language barrier separates the three men. Astonishingly, the physician's first impression is so positive that the border between him and the American officers begins to open:

> I sensed a note of friendliness and warmth in the voices of these young officers. Screwing up my courage, I said to them in English: "How are you?" In answer, one of the officers offered me a cigarette. Timidly, I accepted it, and he lit it for me before lighting one for himself. The cigarette had a pleasing smell and the big red circle on his cigarette pack impressed me. (125)

For a moment, a cautious conversation based on mutual concern takes place. The young American officers try out the few words of Japanese they have learned. Then they depart:

> They got in their truck with big smiles on their faces and waved until they were out of sight. "Everything will be all right," someone said, and there was hearty agreement. Everyone was much relieved. We were impressed with the appearance of the American soldiers, the smart uniforms they wore, how lighthearted they seemed. The smell of American cigarette did not leave my nose. It was different from the ones the Japanese officers smoked. There was nothing arbitrary or fussy about the young officers; they, too, were different from the Japanese. These men impressed me as citizens of a great country. (225)

As we have seen, both inflexible and receding borders cause fear and panic. In addition, they can engender frantic activity. Sometimes, in exceptional

and rare moments, they even afford glimpses of consolation. The characters of many novels from the mid-twentieth century achieve a kind of insight when facing the limit-case of a receding border that takes the form of endless space. In Boris Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago*, from 1957, the titular hero and his formerly well-to-do family escape the dangers of post-revolutionary Moscow on a train bound east. After the many days and nights the passengers must spend in a sticky and damp compartment, the train stops at a station. It seems it will go no farther. In fact, however, the station does not mark the end of the journey—nor is it a place located within any existential topography:

> It was too hot and stuffy in the car to sleep. The doctor's pillow was soaked in sweat. Carefully, so as not to wake the others, he got down from his bunk and pushed open the car doors. (. . .) It was a big station, possibly a junction. Besides the mist and the stillness, there was a feeling of emptiness, of neglect, as if the train had been lost and forgotten. It must be standing at the farthest end of the station, and so great was the maze of tracks separating it from the station buildings that if, at the other end of the yard, the earth were to open and swallow up the station, no one in the train would have noticed it. (242)

In scenes like this, the anticipation of any border at all has disappeared. This is why—inverting the logic of inflexible borders that makes crossing them a panic-filled affair—it seems nothing is left that could matter. Nothing can ever happen; no change is possible; all efforts are in vain, whatever the purpose may be. One year before Pasternak's *Zhivago* appeared in Italian translation, João Guimarães Rosa published *Grande Sertao: Veredas*. This book is the epic of the Sertao, a desert landscape at the heart of Brazil. (My friend Pedro Dolabela, who lives there, describes it as follows: "a very dry region, covered with rocky soil and with thin, thorny, bushy vegetation; sparsely inhabited, mostly hilly, with a flat—but not dome-like—sky; it is silent; you see lizards everywhere, and also goats; you always feel how the sun is biting your skin"). Even more than Pasternak's monochromatic book, *Grande Sertao* powerfully evokes spatial endlessness and, at the same time, offers a meditation on unconfined human existence:

> We looked back. The dazzling sun made it impossible for us to see our trail. The light was cruel. A swallow-like kite was the last bird we saw. There we were in that appalling thing: a weird, Godforsaken waste, shifting under foot. It was a different world, crazy, an ocean of sand. Where lay the end of it, the boundary? The sun poured down on the earth, which sparkled like salt. At long intervals, patches of dead grass; and some dry tufts of plants, like hair without a head. Up ahead, in the distance, a yellow vapor was rising and spreading. And flames began to enter our burning chests with the air. (38)

Escape from the Sertao is impossible because there is nowhere else to go. The thought of a strange enchantment whose spell might perhaps be broken turns out to be nothing but a form of wishful thinking. Above all, any idea or hope of leaving this space turns out to be an illusion, over and again: “The sertao is like that: you think you have left it behind you, and suddenly it surrounds you again on all sides. The sertao is where you least expect it” (238).

. . .

Surrounded by existential horizons that are either so threatening they can never be crossed or so elusive they can never be reached, many people in the postwar years felt an impulse to turn inward—“inside” themselves. “Inside” can also describe existential movement, but the goals of these movements have very different forms and qualities. One possible goal is the individual’s inner sphere, or “interiority.” Others include the “inside” of a sheltered space or the “inside” of a familiar world that, abandoned and forgotten, now awaits rediscovery. In 1950, the German author Gottfried Benn wrote a short poem with the laconic title “Reisen” (“Traveling”). This work conjures up the contrast between the illusion of fulfillment experienced far away from home, on the one hand, and the bliss to be found within the quiet interior of the “I,” on the other:

> Do you believe, for example, that Zürich
> could be a more profound place
> where miracles and blessings
> will always be at hand?
>
> Do you believe that from La Habana,
> white and hibiscus-red,
> an eternal manna could break
> into the desert of your life?
>
> (. . .)
>
> How elusive is traveling!
> Only late in your life you travel to the own self:
> It is about remaining and about quietly keeping
> the I confining itself. (384)

Such a withdrawal towards interiority can provide consolation as long as it constructs—or finds—a border giving form, protection, and strength to what it contains. Ever since the publication of *Being and Time* in 1927, Heidegger urged that greater philosophical attention be paid to the

existential dimension of space. In a series of lectures and essays in the 1950s, dedicated to the concepts of "dwelling" and "building," he elaborated the idea of the "fourfold" (*Geviert*) as the most elementary condition of human life. In the "fourfold," Heidegger argues, human existence finds both inner stability and a viable relationship with the surrounding worlds of nature and transcendence:

> To say "on earth" always implies "under the sky." Both expressions want to include a "remaining before the Gods," and entail a "belonging into the togetherness of humans." Stemming from an *original* union, the four, Earth and Sky, Immortals and Mortals belong together. (VII/151)

While human beings form one dimension of the fourfold and must therefore be seen as part of what constitutes it as an existential space, Heidegger also implies that—like the "inner self" in Benn's poem—the fourfold offers protection and shelter to human existence. "To gather" (*sich sammeln*) in the fourfold does not entail movement away from the inner "I" or from the world of objects. In the logic of the traditional Subject/Object paradigm, the "I" and the world of objects find themselves face to face, so to speak; therefore, they are ultimately separated by an unbridgeable ontological gap. For Heidegger, in contrast, the return to the "I" also means a return to primordial familiarity with the world of objects. It could not be otherwise, for Heidegger sees *Dasein* (i.e., human existence) as being-in-the-world—that is, as always already close to its physical environment: "Even when the mortals 'turn to themselves' they don't abandon their belonging to the fourfold. When, as we are saying, we turn back to ourselves, then this is a return from the sphere of the things that does *not* abandon the closeness of things" (VII/159).

This specific mode of a "turning to ourselves," which is also a return to the world of objects, corresponds, I am convinced, to another kind of inward movement: namely, the movement that brings us closer to the ground (*Grund*) and thus, ultimately, confronts us with Being. For Heidegger, existence calls on human beings to encounter an ontic ground: "the ground as such demands to be returned, *as* a ground, in direction towards the Subject that represents the world to itself" (X/41). Somewhat paradoxically (at least when compared to classical Subject-philosophy), a turn back to the "I"—and from there to the ground—will renew human beings' sense of belonging and commitment to the earth; only through such inwardness, according to Heidegger, can "moments of truth," in which Being reveals itself, occur. Heidegger's "Being," however, is not a

transcendental entity, an entity coming from elsewhere. Rather, it is—in the most nuanced articulation of the existential mood of the postwar years—sheer inwardness: individual things in their substance, perceived as if nothing subjective distorted them. The seeming paradox vanishes inasmuch as a deliberate return to the "I" (i.e., what used to be called "the subject") reaches the world of objects within the event of truth—that is, presence in the unconcealment of Being.

. . .

Albert Camus' *L'homme révolté*, published in 1951, marks the author's definitive break with his generation's commitment to the gospel of Marxist ideas—a movement back to the individual "I," to the earth and the culturally familiar. Camus' gesture amounts to a departure from all utopian horizons in the Hegelian tradition of the philosophy of history, and it is to be understood as a specifically secular form of transcendence, away from the promises of a future that is supposed to lie beyond the individual's death. Camus' work represents yet another turning-away from borders "beyond which" fulfillment and redemption had been declared to lie. The author's merciless critique of abstract promises—which, in his view, betray the present and, with it, individual existence—was fueled by his experience of the coldly cynical totalitarian regimes that had started the war:

> The men of Europe, abandoning themselves to a realm of shades, have turned away from the shining point of concreteness. They are forgetting the present in favor of the future, the fullness of being for the haze of power, the misery of the suburbs for a shining city, daily justice for a true promised land. While they dream of a strange freedom for mankind, the freedom of individual persons makes them nervous; they renounce death in solitude, and give the name of "immortality" to an unheard-of agony. (380f.)

Camus chooses Ithaca—the island to which Ulysses never gives up his hope to return—as both the mythological and the precise name for the return to a temporal and spatial present he advocates. He does so against all vague and dangerous promises of a "beyond" that lies in the future or in the clouds:

> We choose Ithaca, the faithful land, we choose audacious and sober thought, lucid action, and the generosity of the man who knows. In this very light, the Earth remains our first and our final love. Our brothers breathe under the same sky as we do, justice is alive. This is where the strange joy emerges that helps us to live and to die, which we will never again adjourn to a later time. On the Earth, full of pain and hardship, this joy is unending trouble, bitter food, the hot wind that comes from the sea, the last sunrise and the next. (381)

Ithaca stands for impassioned concentration on the present, for breaking away from time in which the past weighs down action and the future distorts it. For fleeting moments and brief passages, Albert Camus must have felt enough strength within himself to break free of historical time that had been frozen by ideology.

. . .

Ralph Ellison's novel *Invisible Man*—which was first published, after years of revision and expansion, in the spring of 1952, and greeted by critics as one of the best books ever written by an African-American—seems to begin with a similar retreat to an inner world. In a basement, the black protagonist and first person-narrator inhabits a space he calls "a hole":

> I live rent-free in a building rented strictly to whites, in a section of the basement that was shut off and forgotten during the nineteenth century (. . .). The point now is that I have found a home—or a hole in the ground as you will. Now don't jump to the conclusion that because I call my home a "hole" it is damp and cold like a grave; there are cold holes and warm holes. Mine is a warm hole. And remember, a bear retires to his hole for the winter and lives until spring; then he comes strolling out like the Easter chick breaking from its shell. (5f.)

However, the experience that motivates this choice of dwelling is different from anything we have seen so far. Ellison's narrator has been denied access to social worlds; he has run up against borders that are impossible to cross and encountered other frontiers too evasive to reach; his experience, time and again, has been that of "no entry." If this is the case, the one consistent reason for these many frustrations has been that, as a black man, he is invisible to people in his environment. His retreat to the basement represents a reaction to discrimination that, while never physically violent, is existentially annihilating. As if to reverse the situation, he obsessively surrounds himself, in his "hole," with a host of electric lighting devices:

> Light confirms my reality, gives birth to my form. A beautiful girl once told me of a recurring nightmare in which she lay in the center of a large dark room and felt her face expand until it filled the whole room, becoming a formless mass while her eyes ran in bilious jelly up the chimney. And so it is with me. Without light I am not only invisible, but formless as well; and to be unaware of one's form is to live a death. I myself, after existing some twenty years, did not become alive until I discovered my invisibility. That is why I fight my battle with Monopolated Light & Power. The deeper reason, I mean: it allows me to feel my vital aliveness. I also fight them for taking so much of my money before I learnt to protect myself. In my hole in the basement there are exactly 1,369 lights. I have wired the entire ceiling, every inch of it. (7)

As is well known, Ellison's novel unfolds as a long series of scenes in which the protagonist is denied entry to various environments and social

situations. Indeed, this is the leitmotif of the narrative. At the same time, it is of central importance that the rejection is never overtly racialized. For example, when the protagonist has the task of showing the campus of the African-American college he attends to Mr. Norton—the institution's main sponsor, who is white—the two men wind up at a brothel where the clientele consists, for the most part, of psychologically disturbed veterans from the First World War. It is ironic, then, that a "dark-skinned" barman identifies the protagonist as a "school-boy" (76) and refuses to sell him a drink for his companion. Following the altogether bad turn the interaction takes, Mr. Norton tells the college president—who is black—to "take care of" the protagonist. The subtle way he is to do so involves sending the young man to New York to apply for jobs—with letters of recommendation that warn potential employers against the applicant. Instead of being confronted with clear and aggressive acts of exclusion, then, the protagonist must experience a series of unsuccessful encounters and conversations to realize how "invisible" he is. But invisibility and the resulting lack of social distinction are not simply matters of racial discrimination. In the mid-twentieth century, this was the fate of all who inhabited tightly confined social worlds. To a significant extent, Luis Martín Santos' *Tiempo de silencio* examines social relations through precisely this lens. In the reflexive lucidity that he reaches after a long night of drinking, Pedro—the shy young doctor who is the novel's main character—realizes that he will be excluded forever from the zones of social warmth that he longs for: "Wishing: not to be alone, to be in the midst of human warmth, touched by skin that feels like velvet, wishing for a fellow soul (. . .). Dreading: I will never know how to live fully, I will always remain on the margin" (80). Later on—once word has spread that he was part of an attempted abortion that ended in death (and in spite of mitigating circumstances that exonerate him from a legal point of view)—Pedro's superior in the medical system cuts off, quite formally, all his hopes he has for an academic career (and the social ascent it entails). The young doctor will never reach the heights towards which he has been climbing:

> Our profession is a kind of priesthood, he said slowly and without any sign of indignation, and it requires that we be worthy of it. I would say that to have a minimum of honesty is not enough—it also has to become visible. There are unacceptable suspicions. I know, you will tell me that you are not being legally prosecuted. That is true indeed but—and this is what makes the difference—it is not true that you are free of any suspicion. (. . .) Listen to my advice. You should renounce research. You do not have the gift. You will never achieve anything. Given the circumstances, I feel obliged to discontinue your fellowship. But perhaps this is all for the better. You have good

> hands. Look for employment in a provincial town. You may become a reasonably good surgeon. You will have more calm and distance from certain social contacts. (192f.)

Discrimination and "invisibilization," however, are not only hierarchical, as in this scene. They are also mutual—and even universal—in the tightly compartmentalized Spanish society under military dictatorship at mid-twentieth century. One reason for this is the fact that situations of social exclusion always offer added pleasure to those in positions of power—no matter how low in the pecking order they actually stand. From the perspective of universal discrimination, and with supreme irony, Martín-Santos describes Muecas—the father of the ill-fated pregnant girl (and also of the child that she carried), who dwells in a slum and breeds rats for Pedro's research laboratory—as he tries to distance himself from parties for whom his situation might offer an object of desire:

> Citizen Muecas, a man who had made it, a veteran of many border wars, a member of his town's upper class, who enjoyed the respect of his peers, and a man of good council, looked down upon those who had just recently arrived to live in his world, traveling in poor third class train wagons and coming from the land of famine. A depreciative certainty allowed him to see signs of ignominy and racial inferiority in their faces. He intuitively knew that those people would never be able to rise, as he had done, to the level of free trade where contractual relations with research institutions are established. (56)

Even a slum dweller like Muecas "denies entry" to others, defending his social status against those who might try to "rise" and join it by condemning them to the same immobility that Pedro identifies as the condition of city prostitutes: "The low-brow realism of their lives was such that they could never gel into anything like a style. Nobody could ever leave this world behind" (66).

Even the world of prostitution can deny entry to others. In *East of Eden*, a young man from a respectable family (played by James Dean) discovers that his mother—who, according to his pious father, died at a young age—is living in the neighboring town, where she runs a brothel. Right away, the son tries to contact her. The mother, however, with an attitude of inverted pride, decides to keep the young man at bay. It is clear that desire to discriminate socially does not draw the line here. Rather, *East of Eden* stages the existential paradox according to which nothing is more inaccessible than what is closest to us—even a half-conscious part of our own identity. The experience, which is all-pervasive, represents an item of constant concern in twentieth-century philosophy. As such, it dominates and determines the textual structure of Heidegger's *Principle of Reason* (*Der*

Satz vom Grund). Here, the author obsessively interprets a handful of quotes and motifs from the history of philosophy, which seem to hold the promise of access to the "ground" as the substance of "Being." For all that, Heidegger realizes, a breakthrough to the actual event of truth never occurs: "Our relationship to that which is the closest to us has always been obtuse and dull. For the way towards what is the closest has always been both the furthest and the more difficult for humans" (X/5).

. . .

Besides the one obvious fact of being unable to enter certain social environments, and besides other situations where the experience of "no entry" concerns structures of human existence, there is, finally, a feeling—perhaps specific to the postwar years—that a return to history, a re-entry into historical time has become impossible. Rather surprisingly, given his taste in cultural matters, Carl Schmitt quoted—in English—the title of Thomas Wolfe's famous 1940 novel *You Can't Go Home Again* in a short reflection on his situation that he wrote on January 2, 1948. After more than a decade in Berlin, where he exercised considerable influence (at least within the German legal system), Schmitt withdrew to his provincial hometown of Plettenberg in southern Westfalia; he would never again be permitted to occupy a university position or work in the courts again. In a sense, his experience is analogous to the experience of Beckmann in Borchert's drama. Schmitt, however, draws much less depressive conclusions:

> You can't go home again!? You cannot return to the motherly womb! My present stay in Plettenberg: an arrow that has already been shot comes back to the string and seems to ask to be shot one more time. The somehow naïve presupposition of this image is that the string is still as tense and strong as it was fifty years ago; and, strangely enough there is no archer to hold the bow. (76)

What the metaphor means to Schmitt is obvious. With the collapse of National Socialist Germany, it became clear to him that his life would never again approach what once had been determined as its point of realization and fulfillment. History had moved on: there was no way for him to have another life, a different trajectory of existence. Just as an arrow cannot return to the bow, life can never take up youthful energy and enthusiasm a second time. Having had—and having wasted—one's chance on the stage of history, no second debut is possible. Structurally, Schmitt's feeling of

resignation resembles Albert Camus' more active determination to abandon abstract promises for a better future. Ralph Ellison's protagonist ultimately decides to abandon history, too, once he has achieved full awareness of his invisibility: "I don't know, I suppose sometimes a man has to plunge outside history" (377). In Ellison's novel, the decision to no longer try to find a path within history stems from the insight that history has, in fact, produced invisibility. At the same time, "plunging outside history" would also mean abandoning the Brotherhood of African-Americans:

> Outside the Brotherhood we were outside history; but inside of it they didn't see us. It was a hell of a state of affairs, we were nowhere. I wanted to back away from it, but still I wanted to discuss it, to consult with someone who would tell me it was only a brief, emotional illusion. I wanted the props put back beneath the world. (499f.)

With no solution in sight, Ellison's narrator feels the urge to "plunge out of history," and, at the same time, he wants history to provide, again, the basis for existence—to be "put back beneath the world." However, the impression—or the intuition—that History has gone awry, that one cannot—and should not—re-enter it, this feeling keeps coming back, insistently and defiantly.

. . .

With such lines of separation in place—alternately bold and vanishing—the world of the postwar years seems undecided on what new form to assume. In 1948, one major line of separation was in the process of imposing itself, as if for all time. This was the line of political, ideological, and economic separation between countries under Soviet influence and the zone controlled by the Western allies—i.e., the line of division soon to be called (and not without good reason) the "Iron Curtain." On January 31, 1948—almost half a year before political events would make the separation visible in decisive fashion—Carl Schmitt referred to a strangely ambiguous pressure gripping his country: "Germany—bracketed and excluded by both sides of a gaping world" (90). Perhaps as the cumulative effect of all the lines and borders that cut through the postwar world, there emerged an obsession with gaps—an obsession with growing gaps and the irreversible separation they produce. Years later, the gap would turn into a visible space, metonymically, in the empty no-man's-land between the two cities of Berlin. But gaps and the pain of separation also penetrated both sides of the gaping world. In this very sense, Yuri Trifonov's *Students*, a novel that won the Stalin Prize in

1950, reaches an unexpected conclusion. During their university years, Olga and Vadim, the two main characters, seem to be headed for certain matrimony. However, in the final scene, which takes place during a Socialist holiday, they realize that History, which has assumed material form in the state's new five-year plan, has assigned them separate destinies: each half of the young couple is to be sent to a different location, thousands of kilometers apart:

> "After doing some practical work I'll come back to Moscow and go to the Timiryasev Academy."
>
> "I see," Vadim muttered hollowly. "Just when I'll have graduated and left for Sakhalin."
>
> "Oh, so you mean to go away too?"
>
> "Yes, but it won't be forever, either; I shall come back . . ."
>
> "I see," Olga said, echoing Vadim's tone. "Just when I'll have graduated from the Academy and left for Kamchatka."
>
> "And so we'll never meet," said Vadim, smiling ruefully.
>
> (. . .)
>
> "Oh yes, we will," Olga said quietly. "And if we don't . . . well, then it means that there was nothing in it."
>
> Vadim smiled as he gazed into her eyes raised to his with timid expectation.
>
> "Are you happy for me, Vadim?" she asked, her voice still lower.
>
> Of course he was! For her sake, and for his own, too—for not having been deceived in her. He went on saying that he would go to the Southern Urals in the summer with a folklore expedition, and on the way back he'd go and see her at her station.
>
> "It's really so near the Stalingrad Region—the Southern Urals. You only have to cross the Volga. . . ." (497f.)

Strangely—and significantly, too—the motif of the gap also appears at decisive junctures in Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*. As an existentialist variation of the traditional Subject/Object topology, Sartre advances the concepts of the "in-itself" (*en-soi*) and the "for-itself" (*pour-soi*) throughout the book. On the final pages, however, he arrives at the conclusion that the possibility of integrating the two has always been an illusion. The two terms are separated—and have ever been—by a gap:

> Everything leads us to assume that the in-itself and the for-itself present themselves in a state of *disintegration* if compared to the ideal of a synthesis. Not that the integration had ever *taken place*. On the contrary, it had always been promised—and was always impossible. It is this permanent failure that explains both that neither the in-itself nor the for-itself can be dissolved and that they are relatively independent from each other. (. . .) The same failure explains the gap ("hiatus") that we find in the concept of Being ("l'étre") as well as in that of the existing ("l'existant"). If it is impossible to pass from the concept of being-in-itself to that of being-to-itself and to bring them together in one dimension, then this means that neither a movement nor a synthesis between them can be achieved. (717)

Another gap—a fissure one may interpret as synonymous with the gap between in-itself and for-itself (or as its very reason)—had been evoked at

the beginning of the book. This division concerned “the infinite” and “the finite,” which, according to Sartre, constitutes a new philosophical dimension. By “infinite,” the author means the Subject’s structure of experience, which will always occur from one particular viewpoint, even though a potentially limitless array of perspectives exists. “The finite,” on the other hand, refers to the ideal—the desire for an object that remains identical to itself when given to experience. Since the ideal object is (and must remain) unattainable, philosophy must content itself with phenomena—that is, with reality and events as they present themselves to the Subject’s ever-changing perspective. The (vanishing) distinction between the appearance of an object and its Being is now replaced by the difference between the “infinite” and the “finite,” separated by an immense gulf.

. . .

Meanwhile, in the United States, the dominant mood of the postwar everyday seems to have been characterized by smooth reintegration and absorption. We have already looked at the Christmas 1945 issue of *Life* and the episode about the Kansas family whose male half returned from war (for the most part). Multiple iterations of this plot occur. “A Japanese farmer,” the title of another story reads, “comes back from the war to the ancient pattern of life in his village.” After “twelve weeks of difficult negotiations,” representatives of the United Kingdom and the United States sign a complex loan agreement to restore the British economy. A full-page advertisement for the “exciting new 1946 Pontiac” insists that “*all* that was good in prewar models has been fully retained.” Beneath the peaceful exterior of the first postwar Christmas, however, one senses a feeling of residual danger. Despite the efforts of the director of Tokyo’s Institute of Physical and Chemical Research, Professor Nishina, American soldiers have dismantled five cyclotrons. Parts of the cyclotrons “were loaded on two Army cargo ships and dumped into Tokyo Bay.” Doubts have surfaced, even within the United States, about whether these devices might really have been intended for military purposes. A similar ambivalence appears in a series of Christmas tree drawings by nine renowned artists—among them Salvador Dalí—that the editors of *Life* have commissioned. Six of the pictures offer nostalgic or humorous variations on the theme. However, they also include a “Retractable, Radar-controlled, Atomotivated Christmas

Tree.” Another image shows a little boy in the foreground whose “plaything is an atomic bomb.” The final picture in the series shows a Christmas tree exploding as Nazi paraphernalia (the ornaments, probably) flies. In the middle stands an inscription: “Where is the peace?”

. . .

My childhood memories have room for trees of this sort. During the Christmas holidays, my parents would take me to my grandparents’ house, a former hunting cabin in the often snow-covered mountains. Here, my grandfather had decided to withdraw after the end of the war. Every year, we chose the tree carefully, and we decorated it with ornaments from the olden days. We would sing the classic carols, as if nothing had happened to the traditions of Germany. Sometimes, we even went to midnight mass. I also enjoyed leafing through the family albums, full of photographs of my mother’s high school years and my grandfather’s capacious cars touring the Alps on holiday. On some pages, photos had been torn out. When I asked my mother why this was, she told me “they had things one doesn’t want to see anymore.” There was something in her answer that I immediately understood—if only that she did not want me to ask further questions. And so I looked elsewhere, in boxes filled with useless objects and empty suitcases. But I didn’t find anything. Soon, a new array of borders had replaced the battle lines that had drawn and redrawn the German world up to May 1945. It included frontiers that absolutely could not be crossed—especially the one that separated us from the “Soviet Occupied Zone.” In general, postwar life did not permit people to go anywhere easily—even to get back home from somewhere else, whether or not the borders seemed be “iron.” The “other world” of religious transcendence had not yet disappeared completely, but it must have seemed too far to be reached even by flights of imagination. Pope Pius XII, with his ascetic complexion and his otherworldly demeanor, seemed to embody this distance, the gap between the everyday and transcendence. Since borders were not to be crossed, since no one was permitted to exit or to enter, at least nothing could happen. Nothing *was supposed* to happen in this world. And yet, the calm that descended was never definitive; life still felt precarious. The world was at peace, but any spark of emotion, the slightest lapse of control—if only for a fraction of a second—might trigger explosion or collapse. As

I have already said, Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*—especially the final scene of the "Tragicomedy"—exemplifies this immobility, absolute yet frail: "VLADIMIR: Well? Shall we go? ESTRAGON: Yes, let's go. *They do not move*." Being unable to move, inside or out, makes obsolete all narratives that presuppose or posit a necessary relation between time and transformation. Being unable to move, in other words, feels like the wish to abandon the form that History, since the early nineteenth century, has held in such a commanding and insistent way that one might mistake it for an eternally valid frame of existence. Earlier in *Waiting for Godot*, when Estragon remembers that he has "always wanted to walk the Pyrenees," Vladimir (who does not manage to get up and join him) quotes—and, in the process, denounces—the discourse promising fulfillment in the future or at the end of time:

> VLADIMIR: Quick! Give me your hand!
> ESTRAGON: I am going (*Pause, Louder*.) I'm going.
> VLADIMIR: Well I suppose in the end I'll get up by myself.
> (*He tries, fails*.) In the fullness of time.
> ESTRAGON: What's the matter with you?
> VLADIMIR: Go to hell.
> ESTRAGON: Are you staying there?
> VLADIMIR: For the time being.
> ESTRAGON: Come on, get up, you'll catch a chill.
> VLADIMIR: Don't worry about me.
> ESTRAGON: Come on, Didi, don't be pig-headed! (93)

This scene can be read as a point of convergence, or as an allegory, for the different situations in which authors like Albert Camus, Ralph Ellison, and even Carl Schmitt realized that History would not allow them to move in the direction they wanted—a circumstance that made them all decide to quit History.

When borders can scarcely be crossed, when movement does not produce events, when nothing is ever left behind—literally or metaphorically—space does not translate into time, as still occurred in the preceding two centuries. The postwar world will become the world of the Cold War, where space dominates because events "almost" happen—but not "really." The divide running between West and East along the Iron Curtain will solidify and be reproduced in Germany, China, and Korea. Whenever the line of separation is in jeopardy—as happens in Berlin (1953), in Budapest (1956), again in Berlin (1961), and in Prague (1968)—it only becomes more

pronounced, widening the gulf between both sides. At the beginning, the Vietnam War followed a similar logic—the fact that it concluded differently may have marked the beginning of the Cold War's end. Much earlier—on October 4, 1957—the Soviet Union had launched the first artificial satellite, *Sputnik I*, into orbit. The event produced intense fear in the West that the military-technological balance between the two superpowers—the condition of stability during the Cold War—had now tipped in favor of the Communist side. However, this was just one of two typical reactions. Another response was to see this event as the opening of the most dramatic border crossing imaginable—that is, as the beginning of humankind's departure from the planet Earth. The prologue to Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition* (1958)—arguably her most important philosophical book—is dominated by her strong distaste for the triumphant anticipation of a "historical" future that, as we know, never arrived:

> In 1957, an earth-born object made by men was launched into the universe, where for some weeks it circles the earth according to the same laws of gravitation that swing and keep in motion the celestial bodies—the sun, the moon, and the stars. (. . .) This event, second in importance to no other, not even to the splitting of the atom, would have been greeted with unmitigated joy if it had not been for the uncomfortably military and political circumstances attending it. But, curiously enough, this joy was not triumphal; it was not pride or awe at the tremendousness of human power and mastery which filled the hearts of men, who now, when they look up from the earth towards the skies, could behold a thing of their own making. The immediate reaction, expressed on the spur of the moment, was relief about the first "step toward escape from men's imprisonment to the earth." And this strange statement, far from being the accidental slip of some American reporter, unwittingly echoed the extraordinary line which, more than twenty years ago, had been carved on the funeral obelisk for one of Russia's great scientists: "Mankind will not remain bound to the earth forever."
>
> Such feelings have been commonplace for some time. They show that men everywhere are by no means slow to catch up and adjust to scientific discoveries and technical developments, but that, on the contrary, they have outsped them by decades. (1)

There is much in this passage that brings us back to the long postwar period and its *Stimmung*. For example: the unsurprising-yet-strange comparison that Arendt makes between an "American reporter"—who, although he does not really exist, manages to voice everything Arendt resents—and the "great Russian scientist" who is actually supposed to have spoken the words. What is key, however, is her fear that the desire to depart from the earth and the partial fulfillment of this wish could form part of the "modern age"—that is, part of the history that began with "emancipation and secularization" (2). Inasmuch as she holds that the "earth is the very quintessence of the human condition, and earthly nature, for all we know, may be unique in the universe in providing human beings with a habitat in

which they can move and breathe without effort and without artifice," Arendt, too, occupies a position of resistance vis-à-vis the dynamics of History. Ultimately, she could not really have wanted the launch of *Sputnik* to become, as she wrote, an "event second to no other"—for this would have meant that a border had been crossed and the earth now belonged to mankind's past. Today, we know that artificial satellites, space shuttles, and moon landings crossed fewer borders than we had imagined; rather, they expanded the zone of human habitation against a receding border. In the meantime, technology has transformed the narrow layer of space that all those ambitious programs conquered into the outermost crust of the earth. The thousands of satellites in orbit have come to limit and define our space on the planet, instead of transcending it. Since receding borders routinely prompt movement towards the inside, this mobile (yet ever-denser) layer may be one of the reasons why, today, we are more focused on the earth and its surface than ever before. We believe, more firmly than ever, that our collective and individual survival depends on its state. There is no exit from earth. The future has become a future of the past. In vanishing, it has left us with the fear that we realized too late that time no longer is on our side if we wish to preserve the planet.

CHAPTER 4

BAD FAITH AND INTERROGATIONS

The interrogations for the legal proceedings that have come to be known as the "Nuremberg Trials" were organized by the American, British, Soviet, and French military administration in Germany. Twenty-two of the highest-ranking survivors of the National Socialist Reich, already labeled as "war criminals," faced charges. Proceedings began in August 1945. Had Winston Churchill gotten his way, they would never have started in the first place. For the final two years of the war and in the months following Germany's unconditional surrender, the British Prime Minister had repeatedly proposed that all top Nazis, along with the (former) leaders of Italy and Japan, be considered "world outlaws" and executed within six hours, whenever their identity could be positively determined by a local officer at the rank of major-general or above. For all we know, events took the course they did because of the unequivocal insistence of Stalin's government that matters be adjudicated formally. However, what motivated the Soviet Union was less noble than one might first imagine, for its officials had come to appreciate the political effects of the show trials that occurred in Moscow in the 1930s. The verdicts pronounced in October 1946 are quite remarkable in this context (as well as in terms of Churchill's views and prevailing American expectations—to say nothing of the outcomes of other trials that have taken place under comparable circumstances over the past six decades). The defendants did not all receive death sentences. Three were acquitted because they had been involved with the Nazi dictatorship only in its early years. Six received lengthy prison sentences that they served, under Allied surveillance, in Berlin Spandau. Twelve of the National Socialist war criminals were condemned to death by hanging.

The only defendant whose attitude during interrogation and before the Court had earned him a certain measure of respect was former *Reichsmarshall* and Minister of Aviation Hermann Göring. Göring answered the prosecutor's questions in reasonable detail, without seeking to deny or apologize for his actions—almost as if he had found his way back to the identity he had had as a World War I flying ace. It is conceivable that

he fooled himself into thinking he would be treated as a representative of a defeated nation, and not as a war criminal. Göring received the death sentence, but he killed himself on the morning of his execution by swallowing cyanide that had either been hidden in his cell or supplied by a friendly American guard. All the other defendants tried to present their activities—unsuccessfully, of course, and with varying degrees of intelligence and dignity—as having occurred far away from real decision-making. Rudolf Hess, for example, had been one of Hitler's most devoted followers since the early 1920s and was appointed his deputy in 1933; over time, he lost influence and status, until in 1941—on a mission whose purpose and conditions have never been fully clarified—he flew to Scotland in a Messerschmitt Me-110 to initiate peace negotiations with the British government. Hess claimed to suffer from a type of oblivion that the Russian prosecutor ridiculed as "hysterical amnesia."

Among the defendants who were neither sentenced to death nor acquitted was the fifty-five year old Walter Funk, a member of the National Socialist Party since 1931. Funk had been appointed Hitler's private press secretary when the Nazis came to power in January 1933; in 1938, he became Subsecretary of State in Joseph Goebbels' Ministry of Propaganda, then Minister of Economy, and, ultimately, Director of the German National Bank and Plenipotentiary for the War Economy. Funk was the party who had signed a contract with Heinrich Himmler that specified, in great detail, large amounts of money to be transferred to SS accounts; the funds came from the possessions of victims of the Holocaust (including gold teeth extracted from corpses). During the 1920s, Funk had been an influential journalist and economic commentator who provided the National Socialist movement with multiple contacts in industry; the resulting donations proved decisive for the electoral campaigns that led Adolf Hitler to become Chancellor. Funk's fellow defendants at the Nuremberg Trials openly despised him as an alcoholic and a homosexual. During the final years of the war, as his power dwindled, such a reputation already attached to his name, making him a marginal—though still visible and officially important—figure. Funk was the sole dignitary of the Third Reich who collapsed—repeatedly—under questioning at Nuremberg. He complained about countless ailments ranging from prostate problems to depression. He often cried while being interrogated, and sometimes he lost the capacity to speak. Above all, he never admitted to any of the actions and decisions of which

he had been accused—until confronted with documentary evidence that he could not deny. Ultimately, Funk received a life sentence, and he was incarcerated at Berlin-Spandau until July 1957, when he was released (obviously, for medical reasons).

Between this date and the end of the year, my father—a fairly successful, thirty-seven year old urologist (who was among the first physicians in Germany to acquire official accreditation in the field)—performed surgery on Walter Funk. Some connection existed between him and Friedrich Flick, who was notorious at the time for being "Germany's wealthiest man" and the majority shareholder in Mercedes Benz. (My father had bought his first Mercedes exactly one year earlier.) Flick had also been tried and sentenced at Nuremberg to a short term in jail for having been involved, as a major economist, with the Hitler regime. However, he did not number among the twenty-two "war criminals." Whether Funk recommended my father to Flick or vice versa, I cannot recall. I do remember, however, that my parents were very proud when—just before the end of his stay at the hospital—Walter Funk, his wife, and an entourage of employees (including the chauffeur of his black Mercedes 300, who sported a dark brown leather jacket), came to our apartment for an early dinner. I believe the guest encouraged me to call him "Onkel Funk." In view of how impressed my parent were by his presence, this was no easy task.

For the week of New Year 1957/1958, Funk invited my family to spend a short vacation with him in a beautiful white villa at San Remo, overlooking the Mediterranean coast. My father accepted. Although I cannot imagine my mother having had any reservations, only father and son made the long journey by train. I do not remember what the villa looked like on the inside, nor have I retained any mental images of Funk in the Mediterranean environment (as I do of his visit to our apartment back home). I know, however, that one night we went to a circus show. At the time, I wanted to find it "incomparably sensational" (and I ended up saying that it was); in reality, however, it was disappointing—at least in comparison with other circus shows I had seen at home (with the one exception, perhaps, of the elephant that managed to stand on four large iron balls for a few seconds).

Apart from a one-day trip from the Black Forest to Switzerland that we had made four years earlier, this was only the second time in my life I had been abroad—and I owed it to Walter Funk, whose presence in San Remo I remember so little. My father and I also took advantage of our time in Italy

to cross yet another border—accompanied by a young woman with glasses who was also staying at the villa—when we went to Grasse, the center of French perfume industry. (Maybe we also made an excursion to Monaco—although I may be confusing this with a later family vacation.) The few photos of that week have stayed in the family album. All of them seem to be from San Remo. Over the course of the year whose beginning we celebrated with him, Funk was sentenced, by a Berlin court, to a payment of 10,900 marks "in compensation"—as it was officially put—for the financial damage that he, as Plenipotentiary of the German War Economy, had inflicted upon millions of German Jews. After that, it seems, Funk suffered no further bother from the government. On May 31, 1960, he died of diabetes in Düsseldorf, where his friend Friedrich Flick had recently relocated.

. . .

Jean-Paul Sartre's longest and most important philosophical book, *Being and Nothingness*, appeared in the summer of 1943. Sartre had written most of the manuscript the previous year as, under the impact of Germany's first important military defeats, the economic situation in occupied France worsened and political surveillance became more and more oppressive. French Jews were now being systematically deported to concentration camps in Eastern Europe. Occasionally—and in a seemingly neutral tone—references to the matter of being a Jew appear in Sartre's book (even though Sartre himself was not Jewish). Oddly, it was in this very situation that Sartre first recognized how decisively the philosophy of Martin Heidegger had influenced his own work. As he noted, Heidegger had made clear to him the importance of authenticity—that is, the importance of individual independence for maintaining and defending oneself against political restrictions of all kinds. In contrast, Heidegger—especially in his *Letter on Humanism* from 1947, which was written in reaction to *Being and Nothingness*—did not see common ground between Sartre's position and his own. If, in the postwar years, one implication of his earlier work was becoming increasingly central—and even programmatic—for his intellectual enterprise, it was the certainty that, unlike the Hegelian and phenomenological traditions, the concept of "consciousness" would not provide the basis or focus of his thinking. Sartre, on the other hand, clearly

meant to embrace self-awareness—even if, paradoxically, he may well have believed that he was following Heidegger in so doing. The ways that Sartre pursued the topic make it appear likely that his reflections were a reaction, in strong affirmation of individual liberty, to the repressive environment in which he was living. What fascinated him most about consciousness was the potential it held for individual liberty—its capacity to negate the projections of other people's consciousness: "it constitutes itself in its own flesh as the nihilation of the possibility which another human reality projects as *its* possibility" (English edition: 86). This is the primary meaning Sartre wanted to give the term: "Consciousness is a being, the nature of which is to be conscious of the nothingness of its being." But if a first look at this sentence focuses on the fact that individual consciousness is capable of negating the projections of the consciousness of others (because it possesses awareness that consciousness can be negated in general), this movement—as the wording of the sentence clearly indicates—can also take a self-reflexive turn. The first example of self-reflexive negation that Sartre mentions is irony: "In irony a man annihilates what he posits within one and the same act; he leads us to believe in order not to be believed" (E87). From the case of irony, Sartre proceeds to a different mode of self-reflexive negation that occurs within consciousness, which he calls "bad faith" ("mauvaise foi"): "It is best to choose and to examine one determined attitude which is essential to human reality and which is such that consciousness instead of directing its negation outward turns it towards itself. This attitude, it seems to me, is *bad faith* (*mauvaise foi*)" (E87). Unlike irony—whose self-reflexivity produces an effect directed towards others—the self-reflexivity of bad faith has an effect on the self.

With "bad faith" Sartre arrives on an existential terrain that obsessed intellectuals—and, in many instances, parties who were not intellectuals—during the postwar years when, after a few isolated reactions that followed the publication of *Being and Nothingness* in 1943, the book began to make a broader impact. This historically specific obsession must have been the reason why the second chapter, dedicated to "bad faith," became the most famous part of the work. But what, exactly, is bad faith? It is different from lying, for here the subject believes it possesses the truth and wishes to hide it from others. "In bad faith," on the other hand, "it is from myself that I am hiding the truth. Thus the duality of the deceiver and the deceived does not exist here. Bad faith on the contrary implies in essence the unity of a *single*

consciousness" (E89). For example, if Hermann Göring, in acting as the statesman of a defeated nation, was hiding the truth from himself that his official status was that of a war criminal, then he was acting in bad faith. Perhaps even the war criminals who claimed to be stricken by all kinds of amnesia had successfully convinced themselves that there was nothing left they could remember. There is no way of knowing from outside—and perhaps even from inside.

The captivating power of Sartre's argument lies above all in a consequence he draws from his description of bad faith—one that tries to show that bad faith is a universal condition. Sartre arrives at this conclusion by way of the question, what the opposite of bad faith would be. His answer is "candor," i.e., the condition in which a man is what he is:

> If candor or sincerity is a universal value, it is evident that the maxim "one must be what one is" does not serve solely as a regulating principle for judgments and concepts by which I express what I am. It posits not merely an ideal of knowing but an ideal of *being*; it proposes for us an absolute equivalence of being with itself as a prototype of being. In this sense it is necessary that we *make ourselves* what we are. But what *are we* then if we have the constant obligation to make ourselves what we are, if our mode of being is the obligation to be what we are? (E101)

In other words: if candor (i.e., to be what one is), appears, at first glance, to represent the opposite of bad faith, and if our only way of escaping bad faith lies in the structure of consciousness—i.e., the inevitably negative effect of self-reflexivity—then candor transforms into the permanent obligation that we try to make ourselves into what we "already" are. The double nature of the situation admits no stability. We have to convince ourselves, ceaselessly, that we are who and what we believe we are; all the while, consciousness, inasmuch as it operates through negation, never permits us to convince ourselves fully. As a result, being ourselves—shaping our own existence, and convincing ourselves that *this* is what we want to be—entails the permanent necessity of hiding from ourselves whatever does not fit in with what we believe we are.

Employing the example of a waiter in a café to illustrate his point, Sartre observes that being oneself shares an essential feature with bad faith: the potential need to conceal something from oneself. It is impossible to live in a perfect state of "self-congruence"; total candor is also impossible, to say nothing of complete sincerity. The harder we try to actualize congruity, candor, and sincerity, the more we are forced to see ourselves as objects of our own self-observation and control; such self-observation, however, prompts the "inner disintegration of our being" (E116)—which means that

disintegrated being, too, is a universal condition. This state of disintegration will never be repaired; at best, we can mitigate the degree to which it affects us. We come to hope that the less we try to impose perfect sincerity on ourselves, the better our chances will be for keeping disintegration under control.

The most noteworthy example—besides the waiter already mentioned—that Sartre uses to illustrate his argument about bad faith in the second chapter of *Being and Nothingness* is the homosexual. (In his discussion, Sartre frequently employs the word "paederast," which had entered broad usage as a word for "homosexual" in mid-twentieth century France.)

> Let us take an example: A homosexual frequently has an intolerable feeling of guilt, and his whole existence is determined in relation to this feeling. One can readily anticipate that he is in bad faith. It fact it frequently happens that this man, while recognizing his homosexual inclination, while avowing each and every particular misdeed which he has committed, refuses with all his strength to consider himself "*a paederast*." His case is always "different," peculiar, there enters into it something of a game, of chance, of bad luck; the mistakes are all in the past; they are explained by a certain conception of the beautiful which women cannot satisfy; we should see in them the results of a restless search, rather than the manifestations of a deeply rooted tendency *etc.*, *etc.*" (E107)

Besides certain aspects of this description that we no longer consider permissible (e.g., the reference to sexual acts as "mistakes," or the assumption that the party must feel "guilty"), Sartre's choice of homosexuality as a paradigm for bad faith marks a performative contradiction and a strong existential tension within his argument. On the one hand, what made the second chapter of *Being and Nothingness* so captivating to contemporary readers was Sartre's effort to demonstrate that bad faith provides an inescapable and therefore universal feature of human existence. On the other hand, Sartre employed a social role/condition that was strongly marginalized to illustrate bad faith. It is easy to imagine where this tension between bad faith as a universal condition and as an example taken from the social margins may have come from. If Sartre mercilessly described bad faith as an inescapable feature of human existence, we should recognize that his decision to illustrate it by way of a socially marginal figure represents a symptom of his own desire to be redeemed from bad faith and its disintegrating effects. (The implicit logic here is the unpleasant assumption that whatever is marginal has a greater chance of disappearing). Apart from that, Sartre's book offers no explicit recommendations on how to overcome bad faith (or, at least, minimize the damage it can do to the individual psyche). In the culture of the mid-twentieth century, there existed

an obsession with procedures and institutions of interrogation, which may have resonated with a longing for transparency and self-transparency. The obsession grew more intense to the extent that the self-reflexive individual seems to have lost the possibility of providing himself/herself with the transparency she or he was already supposed to possess.

. . .

On January 5, 1948, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* was published. Over eight hundred and four pages, the book's contents were drawn from the more than twelve thousand interviews that Alfred Charles Kinsey (a professor of zoology at Indiana University) and his research associates Wardell B. Pomeroy and Clyde E. Martin had conducted with the support of a team of young specialists. Known as the *Kinsey Report*—and supplemented five years later by a companion volume on female sexuality—two hundred thousand copies of the book were sold over the next two months. As a point where endless controversies involving everything from research methods to public morality intersect, it has long been one of the intellectual legends of the twentieth century. Viewing the *Kinsey Report* in cultural context, one might be surprised to find that such incomparably detailed descriptions of sexual practices were produced—and met with such interest—in the traditionally puritanical society of North America. However, a closer, biographically informed look reveals that a specific configuration of interests and passions materialized in the *Kinsey Report*; this configuration may have achieved a unique level of density under peculiarly American circumstances.

At the time of publication, Alfred Kinsey was fifty-three years old. Born into the family of a New Jersey college teacher, Kinsey had grown up under twofold pressure: limited financial means and the ethical strictures of his parents' orthodox Methodism. This background may have been responsible for a peculiar two-sidedness in Kinsey's life. On the one hand, the researcher seems to have made the moralistic rigor that dominated his family serve the ends of modern science: he became a renowned entomologist who specialized in the methods and practices of empirical measurement. On the other hand (and, in psychological terms, this may represent a reaction to his upbringing), Kinsey was committed to sexual liberty for the individual—a goal rivaling his research in its seriousness.

Connecting the two spheres of his life was a quasi-existentialist interpretation of the Darwinian principles of evolution. Belief in the "laws of nature" made Kinsey demand that humans use the maximum range of physical possibilities in their sexual practices: "biology had to be reckoned with when people formulated sexual mores and modes of conduct" (308). Beginning in the early 1930s, Kinsey became known at the university for volunteering to counsel students on sexual matters of all kinds. It seemed only natural when, in 1938, he was chosen to teach a noncredit "marriage course" that prepared participants for sexual activity. From that course—a daring innovation at the time—it was only a step to the project of using empirical research strategies to expand the field of inquiry. Ten years later, Kinsey wrote in the introduction to the *Report*: "The present study (. . .) represents an attempt to accumulate an objectively determined body of facts about sex which strictly avoids social or moral interpretation of the fact. Each person who reads this report will want to make interpretations in accordance with his understanding of moral values and social significances; but that is not part of the scientific method and, indeed, scientists have no special capacities for making such evaluations" (5).

The research project soon received ample financial support, and Kinsey was provided the means to design—and, over time, improve—a questionnaire that ultimately listed "521 items." In the average interview, around 300 of them were "usually" addressed, "since a subject is questioned only about those things in which he has had specific experience" (63). In addition to the interviews, Kinsey organized sessions of heterosexual and homosexual activity in his private home, for scientific observation. Whenever he was not participating himself, Kinsey observed the scenes with the attentiveness he had acquired as an entomologist:

> He was virtually on top of the action, his head only inches removed from the couple's genitals, close enough to smell body odors and hear the squish of juices. And above the groans and moans, Kinsey could be heard chattering away, pointing out various signs of sexual arousal as the couple progressed through the different stages of intercourse. No observer had a keener eye for detail. Nothing escaped Kinsey's notice—not the subtle change in the breast's skin tone that accompanied tumescence during arousal, not the involuntary twitch of the muscles in the anus upon orgasm—Kinsey saw everything. (502)

Alfred Kinsey's involvement in the experiment was by no means limited to scientific observation. Faithful to his own utopian ideal of unlimited individual freedom in sexual behavior, he participated actively and tried to live out his personal inclinations as fully as possible. Primarily with co-

editor Wardell B. Pomeroy, Kinsey engaged in seemingly sadomasochistic practices; he preferred to play the “inferior” role. The researcher had also, over many years, trained for a very specific technique of masturbation. Around 1950, “Mr Y”—a participant in Kinsey’s erotico-scientific exercises—saw him introduce into his penis “a toothbrush with the brush end first. To facilitate entry he had cut the urethra sort of wide open” (609).

Despite his surprising advances into uncharted (or scarcely charted) territories of sexual liberation, despite the impressive questionnaire —“Kinsey’s pride and joy” (361), for which he had invented an elaborate code of abbreviations—despite the unprecedented number of interviews conducted, and despite real results that would change the way sexuality was viewed forever (above all, the seven-grade scale between “exclusively heterosexual” (0) and “exclusively homosexual” (7), which undermined commonplace binary ideas)—despite all this, one problem remained, which increasingly troubled the research team. This was the problem of the honesty—or dishonesty—demonstrated by interviewees. A thirty-page introductory chapter of the *Report* addressed the issue, but it remained unresolved. For even in cases where the “subject’s” honesty could be trusted completely, doubt remained whether he correctly remembered the details of his experience. Consequently, it seems, the research team’s methodological self-understanding shifted from strict empiricism to a more hermeneutic style. Like so many humanists working with textual documents from the past, Kinsey insisted on the truth-value inherent in moments of immediate self-reflexive certainty:

> As well ask a horse trader how he knows when to close a bargain! The experienced interviewer knows when he has established a sufficient rapport to obtain an honest record, in the same way that the subject knows that he can give that honest record to the interviewer. Learning to recognize these indicators, intangible as they may be, is the most important thing in controlling the accuracy of an interview. (363)

Despite such hermeneutic optimism, the problem would not go away. Today, we know only too well—mainly from problems that have plagued the empirical social sciences for the past half-century—that it never will. The final sentences in the chapters on “Interviewing” acknowledged and anticipated as much when they instructed individual researchers to perform a final validity check by means of self-reflexive examination: “Whether the techniques which have been used in the present study would be equally effective with other persons engaged in studying other problems, is a

question which must be answered empirically by each investigator in connection with his own special problems" (62).

. . .

These "own special problems" for the investigator to bear in mind concern both the interviewer and the interviewee. They are identical (or at least similar) to the consequences of bad faith as a universal and inescapable condition that Sartre had described five years earlier. Obviously, the methodological statements of the *Kinsey Report* do not refer directly—or react—to the second chapter of Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*. On a more general level, however, the potential complementarity—and actual tension—between heightened awareness of bad faith as part of the human condition and procedures of empirical interrogation represents a central feature of the psychic and intellectual climate in the postwar decade. The relationship between these two dimensions, as manifest in the problems that the Kinsey research team faced, forms a vicious circle. If practical and methodological doubts about self-transparency and the transparency of other persons attend interrogation as a means of empirical research, actual interview sessions will, ultimately, always confirm initial awareness of bad faith as an absolute limit of self-transparency; such confirmation, in turn, affirms the need for empirical research methods—and so on. American culture, with its religiously motivated insistence on honesty and its practical trust in empirically acquired knowledge, made the vicious circle particularly apparent. Today, we can speculate whether the current fascination with self-deception among empirically minded social scientists and analytic philosophers at American universities is not simply the latest version of a configuration that is at least half a century old.

However, America was not the only place to witness the vicious circle between bad faith and techniques of interrogation; the problem was experienced everywhere by a present that no longer believed borders could be crossed, whether passage meant higher insight or simply leaving the past behind. No borders could ever be crossed—which made the world and the existential possibilities that it offered very narrow. No inward certainty could ever be achieved—which gave life an amorphous, fluid feeling. Just two weeks before the publication of the *Kinsey Report*, Carl Schmitt observed, in a quick note, that the Cartesian focus on consciousness as a

historical threshold within Western philosophy stood at the genealogical origin of the contemporary "terror of self-deception":

> When all other impostors have been unmasked, and we find ourselves in a solitude that invites to turn to the self, then the stage of the worst deception begins, and this is the stage of self-deception. Today, the historical period inaugurated by Descartes finds itself exactly there. Descartes had been terrorized by believing in the possibility of a profound deception coming from a *spiritus malignus*; this is why he wanted to hold on to the *cogito*. Not bad—but today we are terrorized by this very inner self of the *cogito*. (63)

In the paragraph that follows, Schmitt connects this terror of the inner self to his awareness that invisible radio waves fill the atmosphere around him:

> As a reaction, I try to conquer my space. But is this not a boastful statement? A type of sound waves that are as invisible as they are real permeate my space. The fact that I do not hear them does not improve my situation. It is as if invisible bullets were being shot in my immediate environment, bullets that will not hit me. Am I allowed to say "I do not bother with what I don't know?" But I do know, unfortunately. (63f.)

What strikes Schmitt is the transformation of a classic problem of Western philosophy into existential states of terror. We should be similarly impressed.

. . .

If self-deception produces states of existential terror whenever no outside positions are available from which "truth" can be identified or "self-transparency" achieved (or, more precisely: whenever no positions are available that facilitate these impressions), self-deception can also yield a mood and a motif of light-hearted humor as soon as it is staged in contexts that seem to provide the possibility for truth and self-transparency. In 1946, the journalist Giovanni Guareschi began to publish—to great acclaim—stories with precisely this kind of setting; the tales concern *Don Camillo and Peppone*, a Catholic priest and the Communist mayor of a Northern Italian village named Ponteratto. Don Camillo, the priest, has to hide many personal urges and schemes behind the façade of spirituality: the desire to use his considerable physical strength in confrontations with the mayor and his followers, the wish to play the dominant political role in the village himself, and perhaps even his sympathy for the mayor (whose company he enjoys, even though Peppone, as an avowed atheist, should logically be his adversary—or, at very least, someone to be "won back" to the Christian faith). As best he can, Don Camillo tries to persuade himself that his personal plans and ambitions are strictly matters of duty, and even virtues

he must embody in order to be an exemplary priest. His problem (and, from a Catholic point of view, his salvation) is represented by a wooden sculpture of the crucified Christ in the village church; this figure watches his every move and speaks to him in a benign voice, with divine omniscience. Therefore, it does not help Don Camillo that he "throws his handkerchief over the head of the Crucified Christ from the main altar" (4) during his Sunday sermon, when he cannot hold back his emotions and speaks—aggressively and in a thundering voice—about the tensions that consume the parish. Jesus, he knows, will bring up moments like these in subsequent conversation, and he will not let Don Camillo persist in his belief that such a tone was justified.

Peppone often finds himself in similar situations of bad faith, even though Guareschi (who was a monarchist) does not give him a transcendental observer (another Jesus, that is) in the stories. For example, Peppone and—even more strongly, his wife—want their baby son to be baptized, but they also want to prevent the other members of the Communist Party in the village from finding out. Fortunately for Don Camillo, one of the many names that Peppone proposes for the child is "Lenin"—which gives the priest the opportunity to refuse the sacrament to his rival's son. In a conversation with Jesus, Don Camillo defends this reaction as a matter of theological and pastoral obligation:

> "Jesus," said Don Camillo, "you have to get your mind around the fact that the baptism is not just a joke. Baptism is something sacred. Baptism . . ."
>
> "Don Camillo," Jesus interrupted, "you want to explain to me what Baptism is? To me who invented it? I tell you that today you have committed an act of violence because, imagine, if the baby dies in this very moment, it is your fault if he does not have free access to heaven."
>
> "Jesus, don't be so dramatic," Don Camillo responded; "the baby's skin color is as lively as the color of a rose!"
>
> "Don't say this," Christ corrected him. "A tile could fall on his head, he could have a stroke. You have to christen him!" (12f.)

Of course, Peppone's child ultimately receives baptism. In compromise, Don Camillo suggests that the parents give him not only Lenin's name, but also his own: "Let us call him Libero, Camillo, Lenin. Yes, Lenin too; for if they stand next to a Camillo, guys like Lenin cannot really hurt" (17). Jesus grants his servant small indulgences of this kind, which give God's Crucified Son a plausible presence in Guareschi's humorous text. Thanks to concessions and compromises of this sort, which are made from a position that is truly transcendental, the world of Ponteratto is assured stability: the priest cannot use his spiritual power for a revenge on the Communist

mayor; conversely, having his child baptized will not ruin the mayor's public image as an atheist. The stability of the small-town world is precisely what makes Don Camillo's moments of bad faith funny. Such moments always occur in passing because his "real" conversations with Christ make it impossible for him ever to end up believing what he only wants to believe.

The scene of this narrative fits the configuration of characters in *Father Knows Best*, a family series that had begun on American radio in 1949 and, as of 1954, became one of those regular broadcast programs that helped to establish television as the central medium in Western societies from the 1950s on. All episodes of this series are about a middle class family of five (rather upper than lower middle class, for the father "who knows best" is manager of an insurance company) in the generic town of "Springfield." Jim, the father, is married to his good-looking wife Margaret, who is the voice of reason and housekeeper; Betty, their oldest daughter, is in her late teens, and she is followed by Bud, a brother three years younger, and Kathy, who is still in elementary school. As the father is quick to imagine ambitious scenarios for his children's future, many episodes (if not most of them) start with him coming home from work and having "some brilliant idea" about the future of Betty, Bud, and sometimes even Kathy. One of them is the desire that Bud, his only boy, become a businessman like himself because Jim wants to believe that Bud has inherited his own talent for sales. When Bud comes up with a scheme to sell a huge carton of cheap-looking plastic gravyboats all over the neighborhood, Jim is thrilled. And of course Bud, who is very shy, remains unsuccessful—but in order to convince his father that he has indeed earned some money by selling the gravyboats, he secretly accepts a dishwashing job in a neighborhood restaurant. This is the typical moment where Margaret, the wife and mother, comes in and saves the day—Margaret, who always really knows better (the title appearing to be mildly ironic in the sense that Margaret is also the one who knows it is in the family's best interest to let her husband believe that, inevitably, "Father Knows Best"). In so many words and in a tone that is similar to the tone of Jesus in *Don Camillo and Peppone*, she makes Jim understand that a dishwashing son is not at all below the family's standards; so Jim decides to join his son for a little dishwashing, and then invites him out for a nice dinner at a different restaurant. It is as always: nothing has changed, "father" can continue to believe that he knows best, and his

transitory wishful thinking about a son who would be like him becomes a funny memory—both for the TV family and for its spectators. But only thanks to the mother's primordial wisdom do they get there.

Likewise, Marilyn Monroe's most popular films start out with episodes of masquerade or disguise that degenerate into moments of pretense and bad faith before, in the end, a situation of stability reemerges. None of the movies exemplifies this pattern more completely or successfully than *Some Like It Hot* from 1959. (Although *How to Marry a Millionaire*, from 1953, and *The Seven Year Itch*, from 1955, are very similar in this regard). *Some Like It Hot* takes place during Prohibition. A new supply of liquor bottles is being transported to a speakeasy in a coffin, carried by a vehicle that supposedly belongs to a mortuary. The police, for once, manage to "bust" the establishment, and all of the resident musicians—among them, the saxophonist Joe and the bass player Jerry—must find new work. Joe and Jerry disguise themselves, assume the names "Josephine" and "Daphne," and join an all-female band on a train ride to an engagement at a fancy hotel in Miami. The ride already offers many scenes of humorous ambiguity—especially those involving the beautiful ukulele player Sugar Kane Kowalczyk (Monroe), with whom Jerry/Daphne and Joe/Josephine immediately fall in love. In Miami, Daphne/Jerry catches the eye of Osgood Fielding III, an elderly millionaire. Meanwhile, Josephine/Joe—in an effort to interest Sugar Kane—pretends to be heir to a Shell Oil fortune: that is, a man pretending to be a woman becomes a man again, but under a different name.

The case of Daphne/Jerry is the more interesting of the two. For a brief moment—or, more precisely, after receiving a diamond bracelet from Fielding as an engagement present—she/he tries to persuade herself/himself that she/he could just continue "to be" a woman and marry Fielding. Of course, Jerry's good friend Joe—assuming the role of a "transcendental authority"—makes it clear to him that, "in reality," he can only be a man. For this reason, bad faith never actually confuses or jeopardizes the stable roles of social identity. Except, perhaps, in the final scene of the film. On Fielding's motorboat, Joe confesses to Sugar Kane that he is just a musician. (Of course, Sugar Kane loves him the more for it.) This is happy ending number one. Happy ending number two, in contrast, is somewhat ambiguous. Daphne/Jerry tells Fielding that "she" cannot have children. Since he does not seem to mind, "she" insists that "she" will not even be

able to marry him. Fielding remains unfazed. Finally, Daphne/Jerry shouts, “I’m a man!” Without batting an eye, Fielding responds, “Nobody’s perfect.” The audience, then, is left with a hint of “gender trouble” (might Osgood Fielding III be bisexual?).

Except for rare moments—such as, for example, the ending of *Some Like It Hot*—successful films and television series in the 1950s portrayed a world where bad faith mainly came into play to confirm stable borders and identities. Here, there was no need for interrogation. It was a world of soda fountains, milk shakes, and petticoats, laughing school kids and mildly eccentric college students, happy families with three children attending joyous religious services on Sunday—a world where men wanted to look like former athletes and women wore pointed bras that made it clear they could only be women. If this world originated in Hollywood studios, it is a fact that the expanding middle classes of most other Western societies were only too eager to embrace and copy what it offered (while adding their own national flavors to the recipe). Above all, this world wanted to believe that there was never room, ever, for bad faith. This world lived, then, in bad faith about the absence of bad faith. But to preserve itself in this state, it constantly needed to evoke the possibility of bad faith—if only to reject it explicitly and, thereby, keep it operative as a means of holding at bay a different reality with a potentially different *Stimmung*. My parents needed to believe that Helgard, the innocuous-looking babysitter for whom I had tender feelings, was “hanging out with existentialists”; this helped them to know and to confirm what they did not want to be—and what they did not want in their world. The war already seemed distant, but its latent presence was always felt.

. . .

Jean-Paul Sartre—in contrast and unsurprisingly—never managed (and probably never wanted) to leave the war behind. Perhaps more intensely than any other intellectual of his day, he had confronted, in systematic fashion, a number of wartime and prewar phenomena in the months and years following the liberation of France and the defeat of Germany. His most famous essay from that time sought to answer the question, *What is a collaborator?* The resonances of the text must have come from an urgent need, in French society, to differentiate between “true collaborators” and the

millions of other citizens who, when their country was occupied, had neither protested against the Germans nor actively supported them (if one can draw this kind of distinction at all). Unsurprisingly, the way Sartre answers the question points in the direction of bad faith. The collaborator, he argues, is a person who entertains relations of bad faith with himself. It is important to note, however, that, in absence of an observer position invested with absolute and transcendental authority, Sartre's answer—because it is articulated on several different levels—is uncertain and fluid. Sartre summarizes his insights concerning the nature of the collaborator as follows:

> Realism, rejection of universal criteria and of the Law, a spirit of anarchy and dreams of an iron constraint, permissiveness for violence and ruse, femininity, hatred of mankind: all these features can be explained as consequences of disintegration. Whether he has a chance of manifesting himself or not, the collaborator is an enemy of all democratic societies, and they constantly carry him in their inner sphere. (47)

Unlike the way it is discussed in the second chapter of *Being and Nothingness*, disintegration is now seen as the reason for, rather than a consequence of, bad faith. Besides vague qualities Sartre remarks—which could be part of any negative characterization ("permissiveness for violence and ruse," "hatred of mankind")—it is interesting that he associates "a rejection of universal criteria" with the collaborator; this means, evidently, that the collaborator will not accept any ethical rules that extend beyond his individual situation. By "realism" and "dreams of an iron constraint," Sartre is referring to what must have been the most frequent excuse offered by parties willing to support the Germans during the Occupation: "If the collaborators drew the conclusion, from the German victory, that it was necessary to submit themselves to the authority of the Reich, it came from a profound and primary decision that was the basis of their personality: it was the decision to adapt themselves to what had become the fact (*se plier au fait-accompli*) whatever this might be or might mean" (41). By surrendering to the "fact" of defeat, by according what had happened the status of the unchanging and the unchangeable, the collaborator erected a screen within consciousness behind which he could hide his moral obligation to resist. However, the most interesting feature of this complex description—which is so interesting, perhaps, because it lies so far away from our mentality today—is the fact that Sartre associates bad faith with what appeared to him as an ambiguity of gender. In the summarizing description quoted above,

the key word is “femininity.” Two pages earlier, one reads a much more explicit passage:

> To the extent that it is possible to understand the collaborator’s state of mind, we sense something like a climate of femininity there. The collaborator speaks in the name of force but he does not possess force: rather, he is ruse, he is the intentional deception that relies on force, he even is charm and seduction because he pretends to play out the attraction that, according to him, French culture has for the Germans. It appears to me that there is a remarkable mixture of masochism and homosexuality. Indeed the homosexual environments of Paris were a very important recruiting ground for the occupation. (46)

Not only in Sartre’s works but also in Hollywood films (as we have seen), the taboo bracketing any form of sexuality that is not straightforwardly “straight” can disappear when bad faith, seen from an everyday perspective, stands at issue. And yet, it may be only in Sartre’s writings that this configuration achieves sufficient density to qualify as an obsession. We understand, therefore, that it is not by chance if, in *Huis clos*, Inès—the lesbian—displays unusual strength and the ability to negate (very much in the sense of Sartre’s existentialist philosophy of freedom) Garcin’s fantasy of heroism:

> GARCIN: I have not dreamt up this heroism. I have chosen it. One is what one wants to be.
>
> INES: Then show it to me. Show me it is more than a dream. Only your actions will determine what you may have wanted.
>
> GARCIN: I died too early. I have not been given the opportunity to perform *my own* actions.
>
> INES: Everybody dies too soon—or too late. And then your life is finished, the line is drawn, you have to draw up the balance. You are nothing but your life.
>
> GARCIN: You’re a viper, you have an answer for everything!
>
> INES: Come on! Don’t lose heart. It must be easy to convince me. Give me your reasons, make an effort. (*Garcin shrugs*). So what, what? Didn’t I tell you that you were vulnerable? Now, this will be a moment of truth. You are a weakling, Garcin, a weakling just because I want you to be. I want it, you understand, I want it! (90f.)

When the difference between what is imagined and what is true becomes a matter of psychic projection, the relation between dream and reality reveals points of permeability, too. In September 1948, the monthly German magazine *Die Wandlung* printed a poem with the title “Sometimes in My Dream” (“Manchmal im Traum”), written in the final months of the war by Stefan Anders. In a way that was quite accurate for the time—I imagine—all the well-established images of Germany and her cities turn out to be a dream. Reality, on the other hand, is perceived as deserted bleakness:

> In the cathedrals, oh God, of many German cities
> My heart conjured up the fatherland with hot passion.
> Earnestly the Sibyls look down upon us—

> “Yours is the guilt!” I hear from the Emperor’s tomb.
> Terror comes slowly crawling; but the dream,
> While I want to wake up, still holds me with its pincers
> And yet I know that, once awake, nothing will be left
> Of what, oh Germany, I saw of you in my dream. (402)

The poem expresses the desire for the bleak perception of reality to be the dream from which one awakes, and it concludes on this note: “And I want to awake from this reality, oh Germany,/back to you, back to the way I saw you in my dream.” Within the internal complexities of consciousness—as bad faith and thinking about bad faith bring them into evidence—no final truth—no redemption from terror and nightmare—can exist. The character played by James Dean in *East of Eden* has long believed that he, and not his brother, was the “bad one” after their mother disappeared from the family. On his deathbed—after years of tension and mutual distrust—the father is reconciled with his son and reveals the truth about the family’s dark past. But what does it mean to receive the blessing of a father who spent his life being a narrow-minded religious fanatic?

. . .

Feelings move constantly within the sphere of consciousness; when no borders can be crossed, nothing—no concern, no problem—can be settled. In an altogether obsessive manner, novels of the postwar years cycle through the practical issues of the time, particularly the question whether interrogations will ever permit the congested yet fluid world to achieve definition and clarity. Once we have grown aware of it, the motif of tension between unstable forms of self-perception and different modes of interrogation seems almost ubiquitous. As we have already seen, the protagonist and first-person narrator of *Invisible Man* must constantly answer questions in hierarchical and institutionally rigid settings. At an entertainment event organized for white people, the protagonist is forced to participate in a boxing match with another black youth who roundly beats him; after this defeat, he receives an invitation to deliver a graduation speech. The well-intentioned (and modest) suggestion of political improvement brings the crowd to laughter:

> Whenever I uttered a word of three or more syllables a group of voices would yell for me to repeat it. I used the phrase “social responsibility” and they yelled:
>
> “What’s that word you say, boy?”
>
> “Social responsibility,” I said.

> “What?”
> “Social . . .”
> “Louder.”
> “. . . responsibility.”
> “More!”
> “Respon—”
> “Repeat!”
> “—sibility.”
> The room filled with the uproar of laughter until, no doubt distracted by having to gulp down my blood, I made a mistake and yelled a phrase I had often seen denounced in newspaper editorials, heard debated in private.
> “Social . . .”
> “What?” they yelled.
> “. . . equality—”
> The laughter hang smokelike in the sudden stillness. I opened my eyes, puzzled. Sound of displeasure filled the room. The M.C, rushed forward. (30f.)

What, on the surface level, looks like a series of questions and answers is in fact a sadistic game played by racist whites. The situation—which poses a great risk to the African-American teenager—ends with humiliation in the form of “thunderous applause” and the prize of “a scholarship to the state college for Negroes” (32). The next interrogation occurs when the head of this institution of higher learning grills the protagonist about all the mistakes the latter has made when giving the (white) sponsor of the school a tour. All the questions imply predetermined answers that can only hurt the protagonist: “‘I understand that you not only carried Mr. Norton to the Quarters but that you wound up at that sinkhole, that Golden Day.’ It was a statement, not a question—I said nothing and he looked at me with that same mild gaze” (137). Later on, in New York, the questioning continues—only now it comes mainly from within small African-American communities. These interrogations seem as long as they are pointless. At one point, a drunken white man—in a grotesquely “friendly” and condescending manner—challenges the hero’s authenticity and cultural identity:

> “How about a spiritual, Brother? Or one of those real good ole Negro work songs?” (. . .)
> “The brother *does not sing*!” Brother Jack roared staccato.
> “Nonsense, *all* colored people sing.”
> “This is an outrageous example of unconscious racial chauvinism,” Jack said. (312)

Clearly, none of these “exchanges” afford the protagonist any insight, any greater certainty, about who he is. The more that institutions demand that he display a stable African-American identity, the less he knows who he might be. It is “hidden from his own consciousness,” indeed: “I found that most

downtown audiences seemed to expect some unnamed something whenever I appeared. I could sense it the moment I stood before them. And it has nothing to do with anything I might *say* (. . .). Something seemed to occur that was hidden from my own consciousness. I acted out as a pantomime more eloquent than my most expressive words" (420).

Pedro, the young doctor in *Time of Silence*, undergoes long, formal, and grueling police interrogations about the abortion (which ultimately proved lethal) at which he was present. The description of the first session—instead of giving a word-by-word account of the exchange—merely alludes to the kind of thing a police investigator and a suspect typically say in this kind of situation, assuming that the reader is familiar with the ritual:

> —So that you . . . (strong and surprising suspicion).
> —No. Not me . . . (indignant and surprised rejection).
> —But you do not want me to try to believe that . . . (improbable and even absurd hypothesis).
> —No, but I . . . (consternated acknowledgment).
> —You know perfectly well . . . (logic, logic, logic).
> —I did not . . . (simple negation, by any means insufficient). (151)

Nothing surprising occurs. Another thirty pages on, Pedro has grown silent and is ready to sign a document confirming his guilt. However, it would be incorrect to say that, exhausted and tired, he finally gives in. Rather—under the sustained pressure of questioning by the police—Pedro has actually convinced himself that he bears responsibility for the girl's death: "This was really what had happened. It made no sense at all to shout no, no, like a little boy trying to avoid his punishment. Adults have to face the consequences of their actions. Punishment is the best consolation in a situation of guilt and the only possible redemption" (181). The predictable reaction on the part of the reader, at this point, is the assumption that, for once, an interrogation has produced bad faith—that is, that self-persuasion at odds with the truth has occurred. However—and against all probability—the dead girl's mother then shows up at the police station. She is the perfect witness in Pedro's defense. She need only say a few words (which she repeats): "It wasn't him." As she is too simple-minded for anyone to believe she might say anything other than the unvarnished truth, her words suffice to get Pedro out of jail. As far as the police inspector is concerned, Pedro's is a typical case. Only defendants with an education give in so easily to the pressure of interrogation: "Intelligent people like yourself are always those who have the most awkward behavior. I will never understand why you, of all people, persons with education and culture, are those who most easily

give in to pressure. Any petty criminal, any poor man, any idiot defends himself much better. I tell you, had it not been for that woman, this would have been tough on you" (186). But is Pedro's innocence really the ultimate truth? It is certainly more agreeable to see things this way for anyone who reads Martín Santos' novel for the plot (and, therefore, to a certain extent identifies with the protagonist). In the end, however, the text offers no definitive answer to the medical question about how much Pedro's intervention contributed to the girl's death. The text simply presents a field of forces involving three different dynamics: the institutional pressure of the interrogation, the individual urge of the victim's mother to tell her own truth to the police, and the shifting states of Pedro's consciousness.

Things look different in the informal interrogation that dominates William Faulkner's *Requiem for a Nun*. Gavin Stevens, the defense lawyer for Nancy, the African-American nanny, knows full well that, by all legal standards—and by all records of strict fact—Nancy is responsible for the murder of Temple and Gowan Stevens' baby daughter. However, she has killed the child because she believed—and it turns out she was right—that the baby's death would prevent Temple from absconding with her clandestine lover, Alabama Red—an event that would destroy the entire family (including Temple's other child). By killing the baby, then, Nancy sought to save the child's family. The novel leaves no room for doubt that Temple, and not Nancy, bears moral responsibility. At the same time, no legal consequences would follow from the truth being revealed. This is one potential insight that Faulkner's text affords. Once Gavin Stevens has forced Temple to admit that she has been lying about her own role in the case—once he has removed her bad faith—they make a nighttime visit to the Governor of Mississippi to ask that Nancy be pardoned. Over the course of the lengthy conversation between the three, it becomes clear that the Governor has no interest in the truth (which, from his viewpoint, is somehow dysfunctional). Not only will there be no reprieve for Nancy, the governor does not even pay close enough attention to see what Temple is really seeking:

> We didn't even come here at two o'clock in the morning to save Nancy Mannigoe. Nancy Mannigoe is not even concerned in this because Nancy Mannigoe's lawyer told me before we left Jefferson that you were not going to save Nancy Mannigoe. What we came here and waked you up at two o'clock in the morning for is just to give Temple Drake a good fair honest chance to suffer: just anguish for the sake of anguish. (562)

Silently, the governor leaves his office—he literally disappears—and Nancy's confession turns into yet another exchange with Gavin Stevens. This is the second insight the novel offers: the state—i.e., the political institution and the governor as its incarnation—not only has no legal way of reacting to the moral truth, it has no interest in truth whatsoever. Temple will not be given the "honest chance to suffer" that she desires. Her lie and her bad faith are broken, but the change has no resonance in the larger world at all.

In this context, let us look again at Guimarães Rosa's *Grande Sertao*. The entire novel is structured as a confession that Riobaldo, the first-person narrator, makes to a learned auditor whose reactions, he hopes, will offer him clarity about the one question that has been haunting him late in his life: whether he has made a pact with the devil, whether he has handed over his soul. In the end, Riobaldo will conclude that no devil exists—there is no incarnation of evil that can approach humans from outside. Rather, the devil is the temptation to choose evil, which lies within human consciousness. As he makes his way to this self-reflexive insight, Riobaldo relates the many interrogations he has experienced, which were all brutal struggles of psychic power, rather than quests for truth:

> As luck would have it, there came and sat facing me, in the opposite seat, a chap called Jazevedao, a police deputy, returning from the cold North. He was accompanied by one of his henchmen, a secret agent, and one was as mean as the other (. . .). I'll tell you, I never saw a man's face stamped with greater brutality and meanness. He was short and heavy-set, with a cruel glint in his piggish eyes. His jaw jutted out like a stone, and his brows were drawn in a heavy frown; he didn't make any sign of greeting (. . .). Jazevedao—is there any need for the likes of him? Yes, there is. Tough hides call for a sharp goad. And besides in this world or the next, each Jazevedao, when he has finished what he has to do, stumbles into his time of penance until he has paid in full what he owes. (12f.)

The novel also grants space to familiar stories about ambiguities within the Catholic sacrament of confession, for example, when Maria Mutema, a widow, uses the confession box to draw close to Padre Ponte (a sinful but wholly conventional priest who is just "a good-natured, middle-aged, man, very fat, very easy-going and well thought of by everybody" (187)). Later on, after Padre Ponte has died, Maria Mutema attends confession with two foreign missionaries—"robust and red-faced, thundering powerful sermons with mighty faith." Ultimately, they bring her to admit that she was pretending, in her confessions to Padre Ponte, that she had killed her husband because she was madly in love with the priest; "it was all a lie, because she neither wanted him nor loved him. But it gave her pleasure to

see the priest justly angry" (189). The elaborate and complicated confession, as well as her visibly "humble repentance," prompts some of the other characters to affirm that "she [is] turning into a saint" (190). In this way, Maria Mutema's story turns into another—albeit less confrontational and more hypocritical—version of interrogation as a power struggle.

Despite the narrator's concern for self-transparency and truth, there is no easy way—nothing like a "method"—to achieve it: "One is always in the dark; only at the last minute the lights come on. I mean, the truth is not in the setting out nor in the arriving: it comes to us in the middle of the journey" (52). Truth cannot be reached simply or conquered by force. Instead, it must show—unconceal—itself. Riobaldo's intriguing love story with Diadorim, a young man, makes this fact evident. The older man's affection for the youth, he slowly realizes, is "real love, poorly disguised as friendship" (241). It is love "beyond all reason, with the heart at his feet, to be trampled upon" (199). Towards the end of the book—as his confession draws to a close and he describes an impending battle, Riobaldo experiences "a sense of freedom." He allows his "body to desire Diadorim" (467). Diadorim rejects Riobaldo's advances and dies in the altercation. As a woman, "praying prayers of Bahia," washes his corpse for burial, the narrator discovers that "Diadorim's body was that of a woman, a perfect young woman" (485). Riobaldo, who has "no will left to live," remembers his beloved both as a man ("there were times when longing for him gave me no rest") and as a woman ("she, too, had denied me" (490)). The different layers of truth in this love are revealed almost against the lover's will. Once again, we encounter motifs of homosexual desire and gender instability. Once again, they are connected with efforts to hide something from oneself; they have the structure of bad faith. However, the movement of self-reflection is more complicated here than in any other case we have examined until now: as soon as Riobaldo permits himself to "be present" to his homosexual longings, they transform, in "objective" terms, into heterosexual desire. No interrogation, no institution, no pressure could have achieved as much. Guimarães Rosa wanted truth, the real Being, to appear, unconcealed, to his characters at the novel's end.

. . .

Yet even as interrogations approached the peak of their historical trajectory as the sole empirical hope for breaking bad faith and laying bare rock-solid truths, already they were being devalued. On July 22, 1948—seven months after the publication of the first *Kinsey Report*—Carl Schmitt, in a note for his *Glossarium*, denounced interrogations as a power tool wielded by self-declared elites: “Elites are those who can impose upon others the duty of filling out questionnaires” (181). At the other end of the political spectrum —i.e., in the world of the Socialist and Communist Left—the hope for the arrival of a subject- or community-based absolute truth ended up stifling the sheer possibility of truth. As late as 1970, Hans Magnus Enzensberger published *The Trial of La Habana* (*Das Verhör von Habana*), which offered a literary recreation—and celebration—of show trials taking place in Cuba, where exiled Cubans stood as witnesses after the failed military landing at the Bay of Pigs. While Enzensberger relied, to support his claims of truth, on what he described as the implicit fairness of any interrogation procedure, he showed no concern for the fact that a hierarchy of power had set the procedure into motion—both in political reality and in the play he wrote about it: “Only as defeated counterrevolution can the dominating class be forced to speak” (22).

In Yuri Trifonov’s novel *Students*, membership in the Red Army guarantees that characters will see foreign lands in a “truthful” way:

> The Soviet Army completed its great, victorious march (. . .). He had learned much from the war, much that was of use to him not only in war, but in everyday life. At the front he had come to know his own people, their strivings and true character, and recognized them as his own. He had seen foreign countries, and found them quite unlike the descriptions in books, or the view on postage stamps and picture postcards. He had seen them as they really were, felt their quality, breathed their air. And he had often found it stifling and impure, not like the air his lungs were accustomed to. (35)

If the Hollywood method of creating effects of stability and transparency in a world of fluid perceptions relied, simultaneously, on evoking and denying bad faith, the Socialist and Communist mode of producing the same effect depended on an attitude of both moral and epistemological entitlement, which shallow discourses and threadbare procedures could scarcely conceal. Parties who embraced the ideologies of the Left were freed of all self-reflexive struggle by the moral certainty of a clean conscience.

However, wherever truth claims had to be made or maintained under more honest (and often more pressing) circumstances, their precariousness and fragility was evident. Twenty days after the detonation of the atomic

bomb—on August 20, 1945—Dr. Michihiko Hachiya, the Director of the Hiroshima Communications Hospital, signed a "Notice Regarding Radiation Sickness" that was meant to lessen panic in the population. The wording of the document displays extreme caution and restraint regarding empirical truth claims: "There does not appear to be any relation between the severity of burns and a decrease in white blood cells." "Loss of hair does not entail an unfavorable prognosis." "According to the reports by Authorities from Tokyo University, there does not appear to be any residual radiation from uranium" (125). Six or seven years later, the Romanist Erich Auerbach—who, as a Jew, had been exiled by the National Socialist government and spent more than a decade teaching in Istanbul—became a professor at Yale. There, he wrote an essay entitled the *Philology of World Literature* for the Festschrift of an esteemed German colleague. If the claim to truth presented in the 1945 Hiroshima *Notice* was hesitant because it involved uncannily new phenomena, Auerbach described his own observations on the truth of historical experience with similar reserve. Auerbach believed that he stood at the end of the one period in Western culture where it was justified to hope for truth to be discerned in this way:

> The conception presented in this essay about World Literature as a manifold background for our shared destiny does no longer try to prevent from happening something that will happen by any means, although in a way different from what we had hoped for; it understands that the leveling of the differences between different national cultures is inescapable. Therefore, it wants to give to those nations, in the final stage of their fruitful variety, a sense of how the new converging movement is fate—and it wants this sense to become their mythological possession, Thereby, it can perhaps work against the progressive impoverishment of our equally rich and profound movements of the spirit. (304)

Anyone not living in denial and bad faith about the precariousness of truth and transparency—both in an empirical and in a philosophical sense—was aware that all decisions implied a high existential risk. In Rossellini's *Germany, Hour Zero*, the eleven-year-old Edmund believes that he is making the right choice when he poisons his moribund father; thereby—by his very conviction—he falls prey to pseudo-Nietzschean discourses still circulating in postwar Germany. Edmund first hears words and ideas like "survival of the fittest" from a teacher in the same social world where Edmund is an object of homo-erotic desire and flirtation. As a central emblem, the figure of the homosexual united different, half-conscious fears—fears about what might go wrong if bad faith and entitlement did not conceal the dark side of existence.

I remember several times, during my first two years in elementary school, when my father was hospitalized because of a disease that his doctors (and colleagues) never managed to identify, even though they performed several operations that the family viewed as very serious (which, indeed, left pronounced scars on his body). For a few weeks in spring, it had become customary for us to spend afternoons on the terrace of the hospital. Often, I would talk to other patients as my father dozed off (or pretended to do so). One of the patients—who had a round face and was completely bald—was particularly friendly towards me, I believe. He was the one patient with whom my father never chatted (although I didn't perceive any particular tension between them). At one point, however, the bald man with the round face must have put his arm around my little shoulder. At that very moment, my father—who otherwise made a point of displaying the weakness of his physical condition—jumped up and shouted: "Take your dirty hands off my boy, immediately!" I can still feel how terribly embarrassed I was to find everybody staring at me all of a sudden—and how very proud I was of my sickly father, who, for that brief moment, looked like a lion. It was clear, of course, that I would never talk to the friendly bald man again. Years later, I mustered the courage to ask my mother whether she knew why this scene had occurred. For once, she answered with uncharacteristic directness (obviously, my father and she had discussed the incident). "This was a man," she told me, "who was your grandmother's suitor many years ago, when she was a widow, and he tried to abuse your father." As so often with stories from my father, I will never know whether what my mother said was true. She certainly looked like she believed what she was saying. The few photographs of my father in his younger years show a very good-looking adolescent—which made the story more credible, of course. All that I can really be sure of today, however, is that during my childhood it was generally accepted—simply normal—to abuse someone verbally by accusing him of harboring homoerotic desires. It would have been unthinkable for anyone present to defend the man who may have put his arm on my shoulder.

. . .

Interrogation, as a form of interaction and discourse, made its most profound—and, initially, at least, unambiguous—impact in a context that

was, quite literally, “playful.” From the 1950s on, game shows—together with family series such as *Father Knows Best*—helped to establish television as the primary medium of communication for the second half of the twentieth century. These programs (also known as “quiz shows”) were organized rituals of interrogation; their distinctive feature—in contrast with police interrogations—was that only the knowledge of “contestants” was at stake, not some “ultimate, unknown truth.” The most popular American game show was *The $64,000 Question*. Its star participant was the thirty-year old teacher, Herb Stempel. By the end of 1956, Stempel—who was neither particularly charismatic nor good-looking, just very knowledgeable—had achieved a score of $69,500. Now, he was supposed to defend his title against a markedly elegant contestant—who would soon be much more popular—named Charles Van Doren, who taught at Columbia University. The showdown was scheduled for December 5. Both men stood in a plexiglass booth that isolated them from the studio audience—as if to highlight the program’s clean objectivity and truth. That night, Stempel gave the wrong answer to a question about contemporary cinema. As a result, he was eliminated from the program and suffered considerable financial loss.

To many viewers, the question had seemed altogether too easy for Stempel not to know the answer. Their suspicions were confirmed when, a few months later, Stempel—who was now penniless—denounced himself and revealed that the program had been rigged. He had been promised ample financial compensation for giving an incorrect answer; the goal, clearly, was to increase viewership by featuring a more attractive candidate. As an incident in the world of the media, the story does not really shock us today. At the time, however, it provoked a broad reaction nationwide. Its historical significance, of course, lies in this very difference. Remarkably for us, several debates occurred in Congress about the scandal on the game show; indeed, the House Committee on Legislative Oversight held hearings and proposed new legislation. The loss of trust in game shows as rituals of interrogation—we must conclude, then—represented a threatening and uncanny event in 1950s American society. The trust has never returned. One might even go so far as to say that, since then—whenever political, legal, or criminal situations have seemed non-transparent—subsequent investigations have only made them appear more contradictory, complex, and enigmatic.

Marilyn Monroe died on the night of August 4/5, 1962. There is only one uncontroversial fact about the end of her life: the immediate physical cause of death must have been the quantity of two different medications found in her corpse, and, perhaps, the interference between the medications. However, it has remained unclear, despite countless investigations and endless speculation, whether she took the medications deliberately or was forced to ingest them; whether her death was an accident, the result of a medical error, suicide, or murder; whether her existential situation, in the preceding weeks, had been deteriorating or improving. In addition, there is some likelihood—although the matter is not certain—that, in the final year of her life, Marilyn Monroe had had an affair (or at least one erotic encounter) with President John F. Kennedy; other sources suggest that his brother Robert F. Kennedy was her lover—or even that she had been involved with both of them. Therefore, the suspicion was voiced—and it has never really been eliminated—that, given Marilyn Monroe's public visibility, the Kennedy brothers may have had an interest in eliminating her. Today, fifty years later, the debate is still alive, and it has become difficult to imagine any possible discoveries that might settle matters.

Fifteen and a half months after Marilyn Monroe died—on November 22, 1963—President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas. Like so many women and men of my generation (or older), I can remember exactly how I learned about his death. I was fifteen years old. That evening, I had gone to a pub in my hometown with some school friends to drink a glass of beer. This was a daring move for us because the age limit for drinking beer in public was sixteen. When we left the establishment—not too far from the offices of the local newspaper—we saw that copies of an extra bulletin were being sold. The paper announced John F. Kennedy's assassination. As this man had inspired so much hope for a new, more open future—perhaps even more so in Germany than anywhere else—it was at first difficult to imagine what had happened. I remember how we could not help but associate our own "breaking the law" with the pain we experienced at the murder of the charismatic president. It felt like a punishment. Only one day later, Lee Harvey Oswald—who had been identified right away as the assassin—was shot by Jack Ruby, a man who belonged to the Dallas crime scene. Ever since, none of the countless official and private investigations has gotten us any closer to understanding why Kennedy was murdered. On the contrary, investigations and interrogations have produced an endless array of

suspects, hypotheses, and conspiracy theories: Fidel Castro's Cuban government may have been behind the assassination; but it also could have been anti-Castro Cuban emigrants in the United States, the Soviet Union, the FBI, the CIA, the Mafia, or another organized crime group—maybe even Kennedy's Vice President and successor, Lyndon B. Johnson. All too readily (perhaps), the nation accepted that the murder was an action performed by Lee Harvey Oswald alone. The impact of this inability—impossibility?—to find convincing answers to such an urgent question, combined with the fact that each new attempt has only made matters murkier, has not affected only the political system in the United States. It has irreversibly transformed our relationship to what we still call, for a lack of better words, "reality" and "truth."

. . .

In multiple areas of experience, the postwar world took form as a space that allowed neither outside positions nor interior viewpoints to achieve deep or definitive insights about reality. Within this world—from individual and collective perspectives alike—endless efforts to find transparency in human identity and interaction ended in disintegration. By the mid-1950s, methods of research and interrogation that had offered hope were, quite literally, decaying. However, I do not see any positions, within the present-day of that time, that can account for the full complexity of the full range of intersecting dynamics and developments. One does find, however, scattered remarks and impressions concerning an ungraspable change, which made certain ways of feeling, acting, and reacting no longer seem possible. Typically, such remarks were made "in passing," as if one were embarrassed about the feelings of impotence they revealed. On February 28, 1951, Carl Schmitt noted that he often sensed "a paralysis that overcame him and prevented him from writing" (313). Already three years earlier, he had described his impression of an "unroofing and leveling" of the world—a shallowness of life for which he blamed Existentialism: "Ours is the age of Existentialism. The spirit finds officers and executors who carry the business of unroofing and leveling without any spirituality, and they accelerate, against their will, movements that they never wanted to set into motion" (147).

Bertolt Brecht—who, after the war, wanted to believe that history once again found itself on the track of Marxist progress—only encountered symptoms of obtuseness and paralysis, even in his greeting address to the "Vienna Peace Congress" of 1952: "It is this obtuseness that we have to fight. Its most extreme degree is death. There are too many people today who look as if they were already dead; they look as if they had behind themselves what is still ahead of them—so little are they doing against it. And yet nothing will ever convince me that it is pointless to support Reason against its enemies" (323). With frustration and bitter irony, Private Beckmann—Wolfgang Borchert's protagonist in *Draussen vor der Tür*—discovered that there were only "facts" in his world. Now, the truth lay hidden:

> Yes, I understand, and I thank you. I am beginning to understand. It is the facts, the facts that we are never allowed to forget (. . .), that we are never allowed to forget. With the truth, you get nowhere. With the truth, you lose friends. Today, who wants to know the truth? (. . .).—Yes, I begin to understand, these are the facts—(36)

Carl Schmitt had long felt that irony posed a constant temptation for him—and that it was incompatible with action and truth. Thus, he was "deeply shocked by the true irony that here is a voluminous book on the concept of irony lying on my desk. Irony is such an efficient force of destruction that merely mentioning it determines the atmosphere (27). "Presence," Schmitt believed—whatever, precisely, he may have meant by this word (perhaps something close to "substance"?)—was the only imaginable antidote to protect against irony, destruction, and disorientation: "From presence towards presentation, and from there to representation. And why does re-presence not exist, why is there only representation? Instead of that, we have Re-education." It is doubly ironic (so to speak) to see how, in this attempt to defend the substance of the world against the attitude of irony, Schmitt was unable to restrain his own irony in the very moment he spoke of "Reeducation"—that is, an intellectual position imposed on Germany by the Western allies.

. . .

How was it possible to live in a world where identity and agency had become so fluid, where substance and form seemed out of reach? Reading Boris Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago* has given me the impression that whenever the narrator refers or alludes to concepts from the Marxist

philosophy of history, something rather individual and existentialist is strangely present, namely the readiness to abandon individual will:

> All these people were there together, in one place. But some of them had never known each other, while others failed to recognize each other now. And there were things about them which were never to be known for certain, while others were not to be revealed until a future time, a later meeting. (118)

"Nothing was sacred anymore" (127) in this world; "no faith in the future" (435), no faith based on the laws of history remained. At the same time, there was a willingness to let things happen, and letting things happen could lead to a happy conclusion. Sometimes, Pasternak's protagonists feel as if they are being carried by a force that they cannot identify, which reminds them of "all that awakening" (147) that occurred in early revolutionary days. The sensation is like being "a pygmy before the monstrous machine of the future" (184): no guarantees, no insights, just hope, however vague.

Only minimal claims and possibilities lay within grasp. Accustomed to much larger claims—heavily ideological ones from opposite ends of the political spectrum—both Bertolt Brecht and Carl Schmitt attacked Gottfried Benn who, in his postwar poems, evoked and concentrated on short moments of contact with the material world—moments of momentary fulfillment inasmuch as they escaped from universal emptiness and disorientation. Viewed from a Communist and a Fascist perspective alike, Benn's verse seemed to lack meaning and depth. Schmitt described him as "tattooing nihilist horrors on his good pietist skin. This is how he makes himself unrecognizable. His method of producing this effect is the chaotic enumeration of high modern, historical, medical, scientific, mundane splashes of words" (317). In Brecht's estimation, Benn was "addicted to death." In a poem of his own, Brecht imagined how proletarians would react with irony to Benn's verses: "with an expression/more precious than Mona Lisa's smile" (1018). In one sense, Schmitt's (somehow strangely ambiguous) characterization of Benn's lyrical works is accurate. For what they conjure up consists of "splashes" indeed—splashes whose only value involves being touched by the material and physical world:

> What's left is fugitive,
> neuralgia in the morning.
> hallucination in the evening
> both leaning against booze and cigarettes
>
> locked genes,
> frozen chromosomes
> leftovers of the sweaty hip

from Boogie-Woogie,
and when you come home hang up your trousers. (465)

Benn wrote these lines in 1955, when he was sixty-nine years old and a few months away from death. The best we can derive from life will always be fugitive, transient, superficial. Since it is superficial, however, at least it will affect our bodies and catch our attention. This ephemeral quality is by no means reserved to mildly exotic situations (for an old man) like dancing boogie-woogie. On the contrary, Benn also conjures up the quality and promise of traditionally lower-middle class ways of life, whose claustrophobic confinement offers him a certain warmth:

Listen, this will be the last evening
that you still can go out: you smoke a "Juno,"
you drink three "Würzburger Hofbräu" beers, and you read about the U.N
the way the "Spiegel" sees them, you sit alone

at a small table, in round confinement,
close to the heater, for you love warmth.
Around you mankind and its ways,
the couple and that dog you hate.

There is nothing other than that around you, no house, no familiar hill,
no dreams of a landscape under the sun,
pretty narrow walls have always surrounded you
from birth until this evening. (442)

Existence consists of fugitive splashes from the physical world that occur within a space of confinement. (This, I might add here, is the invigorating pain in your lungs that comes from the first drag on a cigarette, early in the morning). There is no question of deeper, more certain, or scientific insights in the writings of Benn, who was both a poet and a practicing dermatologist:

"—science as such"—
whenever I hear that kind of thing on the radio
I want to cry out loud.
Is there any science that would not be "as such"?
(. . .)
and then always those pedagogical phrases,
all produced by protracted masculine sitting,
what the Occident calls its Superior Values,
as I already said, I am much in favor of escapades. (435)

Benn's tone—which, in his late poems, impresses me more than their explicit content—captures distant serenity and tenacious composure—a passion that is there yet remains remote, saturated with irony that is never unfriendly, but always impatient.

What resonates with distant passion in these poems—the transient moments, the splashes of the world, all that provokes and sustains a sense of immediacy, or, perhaps, the urgency of passion—can be heard in the voice of Edith Piaf. The singer's childhood and youth seem like a prescient allegory of the precariousness of existence after the war. She was born in 1915 as Edith Giovanna Gassion (her artistic name, "Piaf," was a colloquialism for "sparrow"). Her mother, who had come from Italy and worked as a café singer, ran a brothel in Normandy during the First World War; the daughter spent some of her childhood in this environment. Piaf's father was a street acrobat from Northern Africa whom she joined when she was fourteen. The singer was reportedly blind from ages three to seven. At seventeen, she had her only child—a girl who died of meningitis within two years. Of course, Edith Piaf lived through many criminal episodes, and she may even have occasionally collaborated under German occupation. The love of her life—which makes the stuff of her biographical legend—was the married boxer Marcel Cerdan, who became middleweight champion of the world before dying, in 1949, when his plane crashed en route from Paris to New York, where he had planned to meet her.

The lyrics and the musical pathos of Piaf's best songs celebrate the intensity of transient moments of fulfillment—moments equal, each time, to an entire life. *La vie en rose*, the first of her *chansons* to become world-famous, was composed in 1945. One intense gaze, one embrace, one beat of the heart becomes endless. It is "something" to hold on to—but not endless or permanent:

> Eyes that make me lower my eyes,
> a smile lost on his face,
> this is the portrait without touch-ups
> of the man to whom I belong.
>
> When he takes me in his arms
> he speaks so softly
> and I see the world in rosy colors
>
> He speaks words of love
> everyday words
> and this does something to me.
>
> He has entered into my heart
> part of a happiness
> whose reason I know.
>
> It is him for me, me for him, for life,
> he said to me, he has sworn for life.

And when I perceive this
Then I feel how my heart
Beats inside me. (All Piaf texts electronically available)

To see the world "in rosy colors"—to cling to promises "for life"—is no illusion here because it goes without saying that, in existential terms, such moments of certainty are illusory. However, such illusions are real for as long as they last. And an illusion that is willfully accepted can never turn into self-deception. The reasons for happiness that "she knows" are but the plainness and reality of her lover's "everyday words," his soft voice, and her own heartbeat.

Milord, another famous Piaf song, expresses, in hyperbolic form, the precarious reality of illusion, for it praises moments of warmth and love between a prostitute ("a girl of the harbor, a shadow of the street") and an elegant gentleman who wears his "silk scarf across the shoulder" and looks "just like a king." "Love, that's what makes you cry/like existence in general/and this opens all possibilities for you." As the gentleman turns to look at her, his eyes are wet. She comforts him and makes him laugh and sing: "Let's see, Milord!"/Show me your smile, Milord!/A little bit more, just a small effort . . . /Yes, that's it!/Come on, laugh, Milord!/Come on, sing, Milord!" There is never anything to regret in life lived in this way—as Piaf sings in the last of her truly great songs *Non, je ne regrette rien*—for such moments of intensity invest nothing in the future. Only the present matters. When there are so few instants that give one the chance to hold on to life, they need to be seized, unconditionally.

. . .

The premise of Edith Piaf's existentialism involves letting something happen, no matter what, and embracing what occurs—and once it happens. This bearing stands very close to a specific understanding of what it might mean to think—a particular understanding that obsessed Martin Heidegger, especially during the postwar years. In a document from 1955, the philosopher bemoans the contemporary tendency "to escape thinking" (XVI/519); specifically, what Heidegger believes his contemporaries are trying to avoid is thinking as a process, thinking as a movement. But how would thinking begin, how would it get underway? Above all by not willing that it happen, Heidegger asserts. Thinking will not occur through effort or by assuming an active role. One must let thinking take place. Thus, the

concept is closely related to that of *Gelassenheit* (i.e., the "attitude of letting-happen"): "the essence of truth is to let being be as it is" (XVI/728). Another text by Heidegger, from 1945, explicitly connects the attitude of "letting-happen" with "thinking": "Letting be what we encounter, we suspect, is that essence of thinking that we are trying to identify." "Whenever we let the letting be of such encounters happen, we will also want the non-willing" (57).

To let thinking happen looks like a plausible response to a world where no borders can be crossed, and where consciousness, subjectivity, and agency have become idle figures. On the other hand—does "letting thinking happen" imply anything about the quality, the relevance, or the potential impact of what will emerge? I imagine Heidegger would have answered the question with a clear "no"—that is, there is no guarantee for the philosophical quality of thinking if (as we should do), we let it happen. We have to let thinking occur, Heidegger seems to suggest, because we have no alternative (true thinking never results from human initiative); at the same time, it would be wrong to assume that letting-thinking-happen must produce substantive results. There is an uncanny convergence between Heidegger's postwar insistence on letting thinking happen and a famous scene from Beckett's *Godot* (which I already mentioned in the first chapter). This is the scene where Pozzo makes Lucky think (44).

At one point, Pozzo wants Lucky to entertain Estragon and Vladimir, so Lucky performs a dance. Estragon and Vladimir are unimpressed: "ES-TRAGON: Pooh! I'd do as well myself. (*He imitates Lucky, almost falls.*) With a little practice" (41). They go on to invent names for Lucky's dance: "ES-TRAGON: The Scapegoat's Agony. VLADIMIR: The Hard Stool. POZZO: The Net. He thinks he is entangled in a net" (42). (This remark reminds me of the many spaces without exit or entry that I have been discussing.) Then Vladimir says to Pozzo: "Tell him to think" (43). Pozzo knows that Lucky can only think with a hat on. They put a hat on his head, and Pozzo shouts "Think, pig!" (44). After some hesitation—as Vladimir, Estragon, and Pozzo listen, alternating between rapt attention and violent disapproval—Lucky starts his thinking tirade, which sprawls over three pages of text without periods or commas. Lucky's "thinking" consists of naked words set loose without any consistent meaning—words that also lack an internal stopping mechanism:

> Given the existence as uttered forth in the public works of Puncher and Wattmann of a personal God quaquaquaqua with white beard quaquaquaqua outside time without extension who from the heights of divine apathia divine athambia dive aphasia loves us dearly with some exceptions for reasons unknown but time will tell and suffers like the divine Miranda with those who for reasons unknown but time will tell are plunged into torment in fire whose fire flames if that continues and who can doubt it will fire the firmament that is to say blast hell to heaven so blue still and calm so calm with a calm which even though intermittent is better than nothing but not so fast and considering what is more that as a result of the labors left unfinished crowned by the Acacacacademy of Anthropopopometry of Essy-in-Possy of Testew and Cubard . . .

So it continues, for two more pages, until "*Vladimir seizes Lucky's hat. Silence of Lucky. He falls. Silence*" (47).

In 1947 French national radio unleashed a similar thinking process when it commissioned a text from Antonin Artaud, who, until recently, had been interned in psychiatric institutions. What Artaud delivered was scheduled to air on February 2, 1948, under the title *To Have Done with the Judgment of God*. However, the program was cancelled at the last moment and never broadcast—to Artaud's great frustration (and protest, for the few months he had left to live). His text was censored for obscenity and strident anti-Americanism. To be sure, these were plausible considerations. And yet, to call the work "anti-American" is to assign it a quality it probably does not possess. Like Lucky's tirade, Artaud's text consists of words-as-thinking, thinking set free and staged as dancing—in the choreography of an ancient Mexican religion—never-ending words and images involving "sperm":

> I learnt yesterday about
> one of the most sensational official practices of the public schools in America,
> and which must be the reason why that country believes to be the spearhead of progress.
> It appears that, among all the entrance tests that children have to undergo before they become first graders, there is the so-called seminal liquid- or sperm-test,
> and it consists in asking each entering child for a bit of his sperm and in inserting it into a container
> and to have it ready for experiments with artificial insemination that may take place.
> For the Americans are more and more convinced that they are lacking in arms and children
> (. . .)
> soldiers are needed, armies, airplanes, armory,
> hence the sperm
> in which it would appear the government of America
> have the ass to think.
> For we have more than one enemy, my son,
> we, the born capitalists,
> and among these enemies
> Stalin's Russia
> that has also no shortage of armed arms.
> That's all good
> But I didn't know the Americans as such a warfaring people (. . .)

Like Heidegger, who argued in favor of thinking as letting-thinking-happen, Lucky and Artaud practiced thinking as simply letting words go (or come). All three lived in situations of confinement. After 1945, considerable time elapsed before Heidegger was permitted to teach again at the University of Freiburg; Lucky stands under the command of Pozzo, his sadistic and addicted master; Artaud had languished behind the locked doors of psychiatric institutions. It is as if privation were necessary to liberate thinking from the control of consciousness—as if, from the state of confinement, thinking managed to rebound from the frequent collapses into silence embodied by Walter Funk at the Nuremberg Trials.

The obvious problem, when thinking is set free, is that, without a controlling instance (an "agent"), the flow of thoughts and words may not achieve definition. Precisely this—I believe—formed a latent concern for Hannah Arendt in *The Human Condition*. The author proposed the concept of *vita activa* as a remedy:

> Thought, finally—which we, following the premodern as well as the modern tradition, omitted from our reconsideration of the *vita activa*—is still possible, and no doubt actual, wherever men live under the conditions of political freedom (. . .) For if no other test but the experience of being active, no other measure to the extent of sheer activity were to be applied to the various activities within the *vita activa*, it might well be that thinking as such would surpass them all. Whoever has any experience in this matter will know how right Cato was when he said: *Numquam se plus agree quam nihil cum ageret, numquam minus solum esse quam cum solus esset*—"Never is he more active than when he does nothing, never is he less alone than when he is by himself." (324f.)

These are the final sentences of the book Arendt published in 1957. The thinking she wrote about was—once again—attached to, and shaped by, a self-transparent Subject. This was an ideal Arendt affirmed—and not an empirical reality of her time.

CHAPTER 5

DERAILMENT AND CONTAINERS

On june 24, 1948—in retaliation against the introduction of a new currency, four days earlier, in the three zones occupied by Western powers—Josef Stalin blocked all traffic and transport (whether by road or rail) to Berlin. From today's perspective, the decision appears to have marked the beginning of the country's partition, which lasted until 1989. However, Stalin did not take the drastic measure for this reason. Probably counter to what he and other decision-making parties had in mind, the action derailed Communist strategy.

If, beginning in the early months of that year, the Allies and other European nations had entertained the possibility of a separate West German state, it seems the Soviet Union held fast to the ideological assumption that proletarian revolution would continue; this would mean that Germany as a whole was to become a socialist nation (a development had been taken for granted from the time of Lenin on). As late as August 15, 1948, the Soviet government offered to suspend the Berlin blockade if a joint currency were launched—and all plans involving a West German state abandoned. Whereas the United States, Great Britain, and France were open to negotiations about a shared economy, they now believed that no alternative to separate states existed. After some initial hesitation on the part of the U.S., three air bridges were struck between West Germany and Berlin, with more than two thousand flights daily. The operation, which was masterminded by General Lucius D. Clay and executed by the American and British air forces, functioned so efficiently that the Soviets lost the power to gamble politically by annexing Berlin's Western sectors. Instead of preserving the option of a German state united under socialism, the Western allies' experience of strength led them to eliminate this possibility for good. This outcome was precisely what Stalin had wanted to avoid.

In the former British colonies of Palestine and India, the opposite political strategy underwent a similar derailment. Here, the colonial power in retreat had intended to avoid political tensions that were religiously motivated—and might lead to civil war—by means of partition. Before

national independence was granted, they would create an Indian State and a Pakistani State, a Jewish Israeli State and a Muslim Palestine State. However, such prophylactic partitions generated more intolerance of—and aggression toward—minority groups who remained where they did not "belong" than ever before. At the same time, it seems that the Muslim minorities in India and Israel proved more sensitive to new pressures from the majority than previously (that is, before conditions of "diaspora" were enacted). In both cases, an initial strategy meant to promote peace created potential theaters of war that have continued, up to the present day, to be neuralgic zones of world politics.

The Left, in particular, discovered that excessive adherence to specific political goals and plans often entailed this kind of derailment. The experience provides a leitmotif of the narrative in Giovanni Guareschi's *Don Camillo and Peppone*, which tells of the struggles (and secret friendship) between the Communist mayor of a village in Northern Italy and the resident Catholic priest, after the war. At one point, Peppone has instructed his fellow party members and supporters not to participate in the annual procession to the river, when the priest carries a heavy crucifix from the local church to ask God to protect houses and fields from floods. The reason the mayor opposes the participation of party members is that Don Camillo will not allow the Communists to wear their red scarves for the occasion. Peppone has also made it very clear to religious villagers that anyone who dares to walk with Don Camillo will be severely punished. To make matters worse, the Communists physically block the priest's lonesome procession. "Lacking a tank" (Italian edition of the novel/1/93f.), Don Camillo refuses to stop his march and threatens his enemies by wielding the crucifix "like a club." "I yield to him," says Peppone in reference to Christ on the cross—"not to you." Assembled behind the mayor, the entire force of Communist resistance then follows the priest and the crucifix to the river. There, Peppone says "Amen" and himself makes the sign of the cross after Don Camillo has addressed (predictably) equivocal words to God: "Jesus, if in this darned village the houses of the few just people could float like Noah's ark, I would ask you to submerge it entirely under the flood. But since the houses of the righteous are built of the same material as those of the many sinners, and since it would not be fair that good people suffer from a punishment directed against evildoers

like mayor Peppone and his godless companions, I ask you to protect the village against all floods and to give it prosperity" (Italian/1/94).

A few episodes later, the aging bishop of Don Camillo's diocese comes to visit the village to bless the priest's "House of Popular Recreation"—a structure built to compete with Peppone's "House of the People." (Of course, both buildings are finished on the same day.) Once again, the mayor has gathered his faithful to block the street. This time, the Communists walk in small groups on the road, pretending to be wrapped up in intense conversations. Their leader has asked them to show "sublime disinterest" and "dignified indifference" to the bishop, whom Peppone has met before (when he sought to make him adopt a more indulgent attitude towards Don Camillo's political zeal). When the bishop's convertible reaches the outskirts of the village, the car is forced to stop. The bishop does not even have time to open the door before one of Peppone's men—succumbing to Catholic "instincts" he has scarcely repressed—helps him out. Thus begins yet another derailment, this time with more complex consequences.

Instead of getting back in his car, the bishop decides to walk the rest of the way. He does so surrounded by the mayor and his friends who, all the while, try hard (but in vain) to maintain the air of "dignified indifference" they have assumed. Needless to say, the Communists soon encounter Don Camillo and the parish reception committee—the very assembly they had meant to isolate. The priest apologizes profusely to the bishop. The latter's sublimely naïve and honest reply only sets the procession going again: "Do not worry, the fault is entirely mine, for I decided to get out of my car and walk to the village. You know, we bishops all become a little stupid when we get older" (I/1/126). Peppone uses the tiny margin of advantage he has inadvertently obtained to conduct the bishop straight to the "House of the People." Of course, the senile prelate admires the building intensely. The same confusion also forces Don Camillo to visit Peppone's new community center "in a very special psychological situation" (127). Later on, the bishop will finally arrive at Don Camillo's House of Recreation and consecrate it with the appropriate prayers. Ultimately, he reaches the destination that has long stood ready to welcome him. However, this occurs only after numerous complications. The derailment renews the strange mutual sympathy that the bishop and Peppone have shared since their first encounter. It also gives Don Camillo—and, later on, Peppone—ample

opportunity to tell the bishop about the secret “ammunition centers” they both have installed in their buildings, should civil war erupt:

> “Too bad, Monsignore,” Don Camillo said loudly enough for Peppone not to overhear, “too bad that Mr. Peppone didn’t let you see his ammunition center. It is supposed to be the most fully stocked in the entire province.”
>
> Peppone would have answered, had the bishop allowed him to do so.
>
> “But I cannot imagine it is as well supplied as yours,” he responded with a smile. (128)

Yet the Cold War—as it slowly began to take form after 1945—never saw the long-awaited spark triggering another World War whose outcome would decide, forever and for all time, the victory of either Communism or Capitalism. Instead, the Cold War turned into a maze of detours that led to results no one had anticipated, where peaceful appearances often concealed an explosive potential.

. . .

I cannot remember a single Christmas Eve during my childhood that I did not spend in my grandparents’ house—a former hunting cabin that was cozy, if isolated, a little more than two hundred miles northwest of my home town. In the winter season, the tall trees surrounding the house created a picture-perfect setting for the holidays. Remarkably, my grandfather had managed to buy a car for my parents: a brand new beige Opel Olympia. For some complex, administrative reason I did not understand, the license plate was stamped “British Occupied Zone,” where my grandparents lived. Since my parents and I inhabited the American Occupied Zone, the words radiated an almost exotic aura of foreignness. The ride to the cabin led through the hills of the Spessart, west of Frankfurt. At the time, the American military made constant use of the area for field training—exercises documented in *G.I. Blues*, a film starring Elvis Presley from the early 1960s. Especially for that part of the trip, which snow and ice often made dangerous, my parents had had a heater installed in the car. I was proud to have been assigned the job of keeping the rear window—or at least part of it—warm enough for the driver to see through.

One year on the Christmas trip, our vehicle was slowly following, behind a Volkswagen Beetle, an American tank. All of a sudden, the tank slowly veered left and began to spin in circles, as if engaged in a wild, irresistible, and ever-accelerating dance. My father later explained that this must have happened because one of its chains had broken. I witnessed the front end of

the tank—the part beneath the protruding cannon—seize the Volkswagen and immediately flatten the area where the passengers were seated; then, it dragged the Beetle about, transforming it into a wreck that no longer even looked like a car. My parents had stopped driving and were waiting for the tank to finish its dance. For a brief moment, my mother and father, who were doctors, debated whether it was their obligation to offer assistance to the passengers of the Volkswagen. When the tank finally came to a rest, they decided all help would come too late, anyway. Slowly, we drove past the scene, continuing our journey to the grandparents' house in the woods. (For the next few days, I obsessively tried to picture the bodies of two human beings fused into the metal ball that had once been a car.)

We did not want to make grandfather wait. He always calculated the exact time of our possible arrival, and he was never satisfied unless it seemed that my father had neither gone too fast nor been delayed by circumstances beyond his control. My grandfather had been born in the small village that lay half an hour from the hunting cabin. During the years of National Socialism, he amassed a fortune in a nearby industrial city, operating a few bars in the red light district and running a small factory that produced high-proof liquor. As I know today, my grandfather—who gave the family its name—had moved back to the countryside in the final weeks of the war. Probably, he was more interested in evading what would become known as the "de-nazification process" than in fleeing American soldiers, about whom he spoke derisively. (They had insisted—unlike true warriors—on checking all the rooms in the cabin, "as if it was dangerous.") Until he died in 1958, my grandfather and his wife never moved back to Dortmund. He managed to keep his business profitable by making weekly excursions to the city—and with the support of a diabolical-looking secretary named "Herr Molgedei" who was always carrying on about "matter" and how eternal life was an illusion (as if he meant to announce his own suicide, which occurred long before my grandfather's death). Indeed, my grandfather's business flourished so greatly that he had bought a large black Opel *Kapitän* with white cast tires. He also hired a driver with a Polish name, who wore a hat that looked like a policeman's (which must have been his idea of what a professional uniform looked like).

Every year, we celebrated Christmas Eve in the warmth of the cabin, surrounded by the romantic landscape covered in snow. We sang carols and reminisced—this was my favorite part—about a past that felt alternately

remote and glorious, then immediate and real. In these stories, the American and British authorities were always the "bad guys" one had to put up with in order to be realistic about the situation. One story in particular fascinated me, although I never quite understood it fully. It involved large glass containers full of alcohol, hidden somewhere in the forest. At some point shortly after the war, my grandfather—much to his regret but in recognition of practical necessity—had decided to destroy them, despite concerns that he might start a fire.

The memory of these potentially dangerous glass containers came back to me, for the first time in decades, when I watched the final scene of Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *The Marriage of Maria Braun*. Maria Braun—like so many other German wives—waited for her husband to return from war. She abandoned the black American G.I. who was her lover while her husband was away—and then helped her husband kill him. For years, she worked—hard and with success—in the reemerging German economy; therefore, she finally is able to acquire a luxury villa for married life, once her husband is released from jail. It so happens that Herr Braun comes back from prison on July 4, 1954—the day of the World Cup, when Germany is playing against Hungary. Herr Braun insists on listening to the radio broadcast of the game before he and his wife go to bed together. Nervous in the final moments before the end of the match, he wants to light a cigarette at the gas stove in the kitchen. The attempt causes an explosion that destroys the house, covering Maria and him in the ruins.

. . .

Naturally enough, the warmth and the safety of a home were essential to the postwar imagination. In Germany at least, a sense of precariousness, impossibility, or danger always pervaded the desire. In Wolfgang Borchert's play, Private Beckmann can only refer sarcastically to the tea with rum, the stove, the armchairs, and the blinds in his former Colonel's home: "No blood. We're already looking forward to the clean sheets waiting for us in the bedroom, soft, white, and warm" (23). Later on, the soldier feels he would be happy lying in a mass grave with his parents (41). In 1949, Gottfried Benn wrote a poem about a house he seems to remember from the past—a house that, perhaps, was no longer inhabited, which "silence" and "night" separated from the present:

A broad trench of silence,
a high wall of night
surrounds the chambers, the stairs,
where you lived and were awake.

Leaning towards the future and echoing the past
the stanza still stands:
“On these black chairs,
the Fates were weaving you,

from these filled jugs
you emanated and dispersed yourself,
with a web of past dreams
on your emaciated features.”

Until the rhymes close
that verses invented,
and stones and trenches float
into the broad gray land. (356)

All that provided safety and protection lies in the past (where, once, it “filled jugs”); now, it decays and wastes away into “emaciated features.”

At the same time, no roof can be built that might shelter the children of the present and future. The same fear and concern are voiced in a poem by the literary critic Lili Sertorius that was published in *Die Wandlung* in March 1947:

But one thing I want to build: from blocks and remnants
a pen where the lost children
who still need to sleep, can bow and find shelter
when the night comes with its lonesome stars.

Being homeless is the bitter sowing of the new wheat:
quietly the farmer takes the new corn and throws out
onto the empty field what he took.
Home, in contrast, is like the grass that sows itself,
always the same (. . .)

Empty and like the clear evening sky,
the fields have become. Without effort,
one day, they will carry stars, smiling and sparkling
in the blue velvet of the night. (223)

Something has been interrupted. “Home is like the grass that sows itself,” and no roof can provide safety if it is not yet built—that is, as long as it must still be sown, like wheat on the field, each year. The more intense the need for shelter grows, the fuller the bleak awareness that its construction is impossible. Often, such longing for shelter and protection is linked to the wish to have absorbed the substance of one’s material environment—and

thus to have become “one” with it, as if by the metabolism of an archaic cosmology:

> There are two different gifts in breathing:
> the gift of inhaling, and the gift of letting go.
> The one presses you, and the other one refreshes;
> life alternates in this wonderful way. (Schaefer, 214)

. . .

“Death Fugue” is the poem that made Paul Celan famous. Still today, it remains his most famous work. A war survivor from a Rumanian-German family of Jews—most of whom were murdered in Nazi concentration camps—Celan originally published the poem in *Sand from the Urns*, a volume of verse that appeared in Vienna in 1948. It was also part of *Poppy and Memory*, the first book of his poetry to be published in Germany (in 1952). The first lines describe soaking in the environment that surrounds the speaker:

> Black milk of daybreak we drink it at sundown
> We drink it at noon in the morning we drink it at night
> We drink it and we drink it. (41)

An image that will be familiar to us by now follows these lines: the grave, a space that surrounds and holds bodies—dead bodies. This particular grave, however, is a “grave in the breezes”—a grave in the air and in heaven, even though it is we who have made it: “we dig a grave in the breezes there one lies unconfined.” Perhaps the “grave in the air” is also meant to conjure up the idea of *Luftmenschen* (“air persons”)—a metaphorical designation in German culture for Jews (who supposedly led an “errant” existence).

The dream of lying protected yet “unconfined” responds to dangerous movements that occur at the instigation of a man who “writes when dusk falls on Germany.” The movement, which becomes incontrollable, also sets the Jews into motion, for they must dig their own graves as they are called upon—in the same breath—“to strike up a dance”:

> A man lives in the house he plays with the serpents he writes
> he writes when dusk falls on Germany your golden hair Margarete
> he writes it and steps out of doors and the stars are flashing
> he whistles his pack out
> he whistles his Jews out in earth he has them dig a grave
> he commands us to strike up a dance

Celan transforms the fugue, a musical form based on repetition with variation, into a principle of textual composition. The phrase, “the grave in the breeze there one lies unconfined,” which combines death and the desire for protection, comes back twice—like the serpents the man from Germany plays with. “[B]lack milk of daybreak” is repeated three times. At the end, a pack of dogs joins the snakes: the man “sets his pack on us,” as “he grants us a grave in the air/he plays with the serpents and daydreams death is a master from Germany.”

Celan’s poem possesses singular gravity because it employs—and transforms—two motifs that often performed a consolatory function in the postwar years: the motif of a metabolic connection with one’s physical surroundings, and the motif of a closed space offering protection. They turn into motifs of death while preserving an initial, positive meaning. The “milk of daybreak” is “black,” and the protective space is a grave that “we”—like the Jews in German concentration camps—must dig for ourselves. I am aware of no other text in which the relationship between a movement that threatens to escape control and the longing for a shielding enclosure is more inseparable—or more circular, and therefore more hopeless. No solution—no positive perspective—is to be found anywhere other than in death. Paradoxically, death alone offers redemption from—and protection against—murder. This is why Margaret’s golden hair cannot appear without the “ashen hair” of Shulamith. Is death an exit here, the exit from a world in which nothing can be left behind—yet an exit behind which no life lies waiting?

Paul Celan’s early poetic works offer almost endless variations of the “container” motif, which register as many different shades of emotion. A dense web of associations and tensions—and the underlying relationship between the desire for containers and situations of derailment (or of movements that escape control)—is always in view. Glasses, cups, and chalices (*Kelche*)—that is, containers of liquids that invite one to drink—feature in most of his works from the late 1940s and early 1950s:

> The table moves in waves, up the hours and down,
> the wind fills the cups,
> the sea brings the food closer:
> the erring eye, the thundering ear,
> the fish and the serpent—
>
> The table moves in waves, out of the night and back in,
> and above me float the flags of nations,

and beside me, people row coffins to the shore,
and below me shine the skies and the stars as at home on
Saint John's day! (I/76)

Glasses, cups, and chalices gather the elements of the natural world that surrounds us. They contain the sea and sky, water and thunderstorms. Almost always they conjure up—within the textual space opened by the verses and stanzas—images of different vessels with different shapes—such as the "coffins" that "people row to the shore." However, all containers can rupture and release what they once gathered:

Who uses blood as a coin and death as wine, as you and all carnations do,
blows the glass for his chalice by my hands,
colors it red with the word I did not say,
breaks it into pieces with the stone of a faraway tear. (I/76)

The earthen jug may well be Celan's favorite image. Unlike cups, jugs have bellies that hold and necks that protect the liquid within them instead of offering a fluid surface to the sky. Because they are anthropomorphic, then, jugs belong equally among humans and the gods. Sometimes, they are objects. At other points, they are companions:

At the long tables of time,
the jugs of God are carousing.
They drink and empty the eyes of the seeing and the blind,
the hearts of merging shadows.
They are most potent carousers.
They bring emptiness to their mouths and fullness
and never spill like you and me. (I/56)

Jugs can drink in the eyes. At the same time, because they are containers, jugs are also heavy and can break (III/14). Jugs gather, protect, and offer to human mouths the elements of the material world, yet they seem to possess a life of their own. As "living things," they have often received divine or human blessing, and human eyes may behold them (I/78).

If jugs so often come to life in Celan's poems, mussels and shells belong to the material world—the world of coral (III/128), pearls, pebbles, and the moon. They never surrender the hard matter they contain. But even vessels full of liquid and tissue—like grapes, nuts, and pustules—hardly ever yield anything. They remain unredeemed and inert—without divine blessing. *Corona*, one of Celan's better known early poems, provides an exception. Here, time is "peeled out of nuts" for a moment—but then it goes back where it came from:

From my hand fall eats its leaf: we are friends.

We peel the time out of nuts and teach it to walk:
The time returns into the pairing. (I/37)

Although containers gather and condense the natural world, they do not make what they collect readily available to humans. Hollow containers in particular—like the tents that we know from narrative sequences in the *Torah* (and like graves, coffins, fortresses, and jails, too)—offer protection even as they take away the freedom to exit. Inasmuch as they deny such freedom, they signify the closeness of death:

Set your foot in the ditch, put up the tent:
the sister will follow you there,
and death, emerging from the eyelid,
will break the welcome bread,
and reach for the cup as you do.

You will spice the wine for death. (I/73)

In those texts, in which containers neither bar exit nor yield their inner substance, they often connect to other vessels that form part of living organisms: above all, they connect with mouths, but sometimes also with hands; the mouths and hands will turn into buds and flowers—into wombs, lust, and a beating heart:

We drank with greedy mouths:
It tasted like gall
but sparkled like wine—
I followed the beam of your eyes,
and the tongue promised us sweetness.
(it sputtered, and sputters still.)

Silence! The thorn goes deeper into your heart:
It is the rose's ally. (I/73)

Nothing—not even the metabolic connection between the world and life—is ever free from precariousness and risk in Celan's world of words and images. Just as jugs can break, mouths can harden into ice and stone (I/114). On rare occasions, containers may turn into words or names and call forth what they represent.

What are we to make of this poetic world and the intensity of its imagery? Its multiple, mainly overlapping elements do not yield a coherent doctrine or anything one might call a "system." Instead, when we read Celan's early texts, we feel we stand within a force field. The central presence of the container-motif promises protection—the fullness of material life that human existence can hold onto, while powers and movements beyond control constantly threaten to derail it. In the best case

—but this is a rare occurrence—vessels represent the nurturing side of life-giving metabolisms. On the other hand, they can frustrate us by breaking or rejecting our desire for substance; when this occurs, we are trapped by bitterness, petrification, and death. Death, finally, can provide the one exit that redeems us from danger, pain, and torture. Nothing is without ambiguity in this field of tension. The one who tears his heart from his breast will live; no joy exists without pain or fear; no heart beats without the threat of death in a universe made of desire, substance, and tension between the things that gather and hold the material world:

> Whoever tears his heart out of his breast at night, reaches for the rose,
> His is its petal and thorn,
> for him it will put light on the plate,
> for him it will fill cups with breath,
> for him the shadows of love will roar.
>
> Whoever tears his heart out of his breast at night and throws it high,
> will hit the mark,
> he will harden the stone,
> for him the blood will toll in the clock,
> for him the hour will strike time from his hand:
> he may play with beautiful balls
> and speak about you and me. (I/51)

. . .

A remarkable affinity exists between Celan's early work and poems written during the mid-twentieth century by João Cabral de Melo Neto, who was, at the time, considered Brazil's most important lyrical author. When one reads these authors' texts synoptically, one has the impression that Cabral and Celan are playing different (but somehow related) games with the same cards. In Cabral's texts, too, the image of shells as containers occurs frequently. Here, they evoke corpses and words, above all:

> I exit from my poem
> like one who washes his hands.
>
> A few shells turned, crystallized
> by the sum of attention: a few words
> that I have set free like a bird.
>
> Perhaps one of those shells
> (or birds) might remember,
> concave, the body of the dead
> gesture already filled by the air;
>
> perhaps, like the empty

shirt I have shed. (37)

Seashells “lost in the sandy tides” are “like hair” for Cabral, and they differ from the “form attained” in a poem “like the end of a ball of yarn/that slowly unwinds/one’s attention” (47). Poems that are containers can explode; they can break the white yarn—and even the concrete—that composes them:

The poem, with its horses,
wants to explode
your clear time; break
its white yarn,
its mute and cool concrete. (43)

Seashells, corpses, yarn, and hair are the cards that Cabral deals in his poems—crystallization and explosion, the game itself.

Another game the poet plays involves corpses that fit—or do not fit—into their graves. The game occurs in two poems about cemeteries in Pernambuco, the province in northern Brazilian where Cabral was born. The ground for the graves of people who worked in the sugarcane fields is uneven—wavy like the surface of a burial at sea; the tombstones “are less crosses than masts/already half shipwrecked” (71). Those who slept in hammocks in life do not lie in coffins. They rest on the ground:

None of these dead men here
Comes dressed in a coffin.
Therefore they are not buried
But spilled out on the ground.

Wrapped in the hammocks they slept in,
Exposed to sun and rain,
They come bringing their own flies.
The ground fits them like a glove.

Dead, they lived in the open air.
Today, they inhabit the open earth,
So much earth that the earth
Does not feel their intrusion. (69)

From a social—or even a “political”—point of few, one may read this text as a complaint—or even accusation—that concerns the fate of the poor. Yet Cabral’s poems are more about the existential challenge of finding a space in the material world than about social justice. Not finding a grave —“inhabiting the open earth” that “fits like a glove”—can even represent a privilege.

As the ground and the landscape to which it belongs are home to bodies alive and dead, the earth comes alive; it is a vessel pregnant with bodies:

> Smooth like the belly
> Of a pregnant dog,
> the river swells
> without ever bursting.
> The river's childbirth
> is like a dog's,
> fluid and invertebrate.
>
> And I never saw it seethe
> (as bread when rising
> seethes).
> In silence
> the river bears its bloated poverty,
> pregnant with black earth.

The landscape yields silence:

> in black earthen capes,
> in black earthen boots or gloves
> for the foot or hand
> that plunges in. (57)

If plants grow in metabolic relation to the earth, then words and texts are minerals—inorganic matter taken from deep structures that bring elements together in space: "Inorganic is/the line of the horizon,/our names, those things/made of words./Inorganic, finally, is/any book:/because inorganic is the written/word, the cold nature/of the written word" (49). Such dryness, which provides the ground for the words and texts in Cabral's game, poses a threat to organic life when it becomes a desert. Then, it threatens life in a manner equivalent to the menace of incontrollable movement in Paul Celan's world:

> (The tree distils
> the earth, drop by drop;
> the whole earth
> drops, fruit!
>
> While in the order
> of another kind of orchard
> attention distils
> ripe words.)
>
> To cultivate the desert
> like an orchard in reverse:
> then, nothing more
> distils; evaporates;
> where an apple was

hunger remains;

where there was a word
(colts or bulls contained)
the severe form
of emptiness remains. (51)

Fullness, above all, roused desire in Celan's poetic game. For Cabral, in contrast, emptiness provides the more central dimension—emptiness without words, a desert that leaves life thirsting and hungry. However, this emptiness is a severe and demanding form, and therefore productive—not nothing, after all.

. . .

Ernst Robert Curtius—the foremost German Romanist in his day and a professor at the University of Bonn—published his monumental work, *European Literature and Latin Middle Ages*, in 1948. Describing a broad intellectual landscape whose importance had long been underestimated, if not overlooked altogether—a repertoire of literary motifs and rhetorical forms that connected classical antiquity and European modernity—the study was meant to provide an antidote to the looming threat of cultural and historical discontinuity. *European Literature and Latin Middle Ages* was preceded by a more openly polemical work entitled *Deutscher Geist in Gefahr* (*The German Spirit in Danger*), which Curtius published in 1932—the year before the National Socialists rose to power. Curtius was one of the few intellectuals who managed to survive the years between 1933 and 1945 largely unbothered (and at a distance from the National Socialist regime). Therefore, readers have never doubted that *European Literature and Latin Middle Ages* was written, above all, in response to the Nazi years. All the same, however, this fateful period goes unmentioned, even in the book's long and philosophically sophisticated first chapter. Discontinuity as a horizon of reference permeates every sentence in the book, yet the word itself does not appear. Instead, Curtius discusses a number of theoretical works that try to identify a new relation between past and present. Most of them were published in the years following the First World War and share the assumption that the course of history needs to be reset: "The first World War had made obvious the crisis of European culture. How do cultures, how do the historical bodies that carry them emerge, grow, and fall into decadence? Only a systematically minded comparative morphology of

cultures can hope to answer the question" (14). This is the task Curtius set himself in his book—a work that commands our attention both as a record of the intellectual climate in postwar Germany and as a monument of scholarship. Curtius' book breathes in the air of its own time, but the author presents no argument about the course to pursue in the future.

In contrast, Pier Paolo Pasolini, the Italian poet and (subsequently) director, was obsessed with maintaining—if not in an orthodox manner—the tenets and promises of Marxist philosophy against the political, social, and economic realities of his country and even his own life. Around 1950, when Pasolini was in his late twenties, the tension between what he believed to have been promised and an inner sense of unrest—which seemed to imply both the risk of, and the hope for, existential derailment—became the dominant topic in his poems. The descriptions of this existential that they provide the situation always resonate, allegorically, with historical conditions in Italy:

> I am happy: a highly praised boy,
> resting as he sleeps behind violets,
> he has forgotten all play and risk,
> with a wound that bleeds without hurting,
>
> the love of affectionate friends,
> I am happy, a pretty farmer
> who dies burning behind flaming gardens,
> a rose tortured by the morning's cold,
>
> feather between the lips of a drunken wind,
> how happy I am, in my heart I feel
> the crazy flight of a queen bee,
>
> I am a white pitiful garden . . .
> God lost in unhappiness,
> Is this sweet delirium a hint of you? (696)

Reading along biographical lines, one has every reason to connect stanzas like these with Pasolini's notorious desire for young men—preferably, adolescents from the fringes of society who have a penchant for crime and violence. One is justified, then, in connecting Pasolini's verse with a provocative character trait that unsettled even some of the author's best friends—up to his bloody death in November 1975. In the context of the postwar world, however, it may be even more important to see how the "happy, highly praised boy" cannot find a comfortable place in the bucolic environment of nature, for as long as the queen bee that buzzes in his body acts with such force, his "sweet delirium" makes him detect a "hint of

God.” The boy’s physical presence is light—he is but a “feather in the lips of a drunken wind,” and nothing in the surrounding world is stable enough to hold onto.

A few years later—in a long poem that belongs to a collection of texts dedicated to the Marxist philosopher and resistance fighter Antonio Gramsci—Pasolini describes the situation of the Italian people in a similar way. When Pasolini writes “people,” he always means “proletariat.” The proletarians know that the world they are living in is not the one promised to them by “modernity.” In this respect, they cannot be deceived. And yet, if there is no comfort to be found in Pasolini’s autobiographical poems, does it not follow that the proletariat has not found a way of its own to “be”—that is, to participate in—history? Pasolini provides a remarkable answer when he avoids any predetermined intellectual position:

> Suddenly the year nineteen hundred
> fifty-two comes over Italy;
> only the people has a true feeling
> of it; as it is never exempted from time,
> the people is never deceived by Modernity, although
> the most modern is always this, that people spread
> over suburbs and neighborhoods, always with
> new young generations—new in the old way—
> who honestly repeat what already is past. (871)

Modernity that does not satisfy or take interest in the needs of the people—and this is what the verses seem to suggest—has no right to claim that it will lead to a better future. Modernity that has been thus derailed makes the proletariat seem stagnant “although” it alone is “never exempted from time”: only the people can be truly “modern.” Neither abstract reflections nor programs deserve to be called “history.” Only immediacy and life-in-the-present have this right:

> We who live in one generation
> each generation that has lived
> here in this now-humiliated
> land, we have no way to tell
> who truly participates in history,
> we only know it by oral, magic experience;
> but life is only of those in
> presence of life, outside memory,
> in their own inevitable life. (878)

For Pasolini, there is no philosophical way around the fact that true life is life in embodied presence, in the present; “being in history” means paying

attention to—and standing in the service of—this life. Only life's inescapable and present concreteness matters. This experience of brutal directness—which is history itself—returns in an autobiographical poem from 1960. Once again, the text seems to allude to sexual desires. The poet no longer feels protected by his mother's womb or the petals of the rose; he stands exposed, out in the open; the experience, while harsh, feels right:

> Once there was nothing that could defeat me.
> I was locked into life as in a mother's
> womb, in this warm
> fragrance of the humble rose under morning dew.
> But I was fighting to get out.
> (. . .)
> The fight is over,
> and I won. My private life is no longer
> closed, covered by the petals of a rose,
> by a house, a mother, a shy passion.
> It is public. But the life I did not know
> has also become close and familiar to me,
> it gave itself to understand, little by little,
> it imposed itself, necessary, brutal. (1053)

Pasolini belonged to a generation of outstanding intellectuals who (above all in Europe) had embraced Marxist philosophy and Communist politics under Fascist oppression and in the immediate postwar period. They had done so in hope for a new beginning, but then they grew increasingly disappointed by the inflexibility with which most Left-wing parties interpreted—and often "corrected"—the "course of history" when it did not confirm official predictions. Among the numerous Left-wing intellectuals disappointed in this manner, only a few—like Pasolini—refused to yield to the inflexibility of the Party or to break with Communism. (Indeed, Pasolini did not do so even when the Italian Communist Party excluded him from its ranks.) When faced with doctrinaire inflexibility, others proved more opportunistic—and flexible. One of the more docile intellectuals was Bertolt Brecht. In response to a political protest on the streets of East Berlin on June 17, 1953, he composed a sarcastic poem that quoted a statement issued by the country's Communist Party, which affirmed that "the people had jeopardized and lost the trust of the Government." Brecht added an ironic question of his own whether, in a case like this, it would not be better for the government to dissolve the people and elect a new one. However, another text that Brecht wrote—which ended up being published by the government—struck a rather different tone: "As soon as it became clear,

during the morning of June 17, that the workers' demonstrations were derailed by Cold War purposes, I expressed my solidarity with the German Socialist Unity Party. Now I hope that the instigators will be identified and isolated, their networks destroyed, so that workers who protested out of justified frustration will not be confused with the instigators" (XX/327). Even more starry-eyed was the Soviet author Yuri Trifonov who, in the preface to his award-winning novel *Students* dated October 20, 1952, even apologized for the negative characterizations that his fiction contained. Unwilling to acknowledge that the course of history could possibly differ from what had been predicted, Trifonov relegates such personages to a past that is in the process of yielding to a new present:

> And I realized that I must write not only about (. . .) "positive" characters of our time, but about people (. . .) whose attitudes are a harmful hang-over from an earlier period. Fortunately, such people are rarely to be met among our students, but we are bound to remark them in order to remake them and take them with us into the bright future when communism will have been achieved. (10)

Reading such forced positive thinking—a kind of "political correctness" *avant la lettre*—I invariably recall my days as a member of the German Socialist Student Association (SDS) in the late 1960s. We, too, pretended never to doubt that we knew the direction in which history had to go. But did any of us fully believe what we said? In my own case, what I remember provides a perfect (and therefore utterly banal) example of bad faith. I hardly ever lacked skepticism about my own words of certainty. At the same time, however, it was an invigorating experience to confront the previous generation's certainties—or its silence—with what we wanted to be so sure we believed in. From this perspective—and in admiration of the provocative gestures of superiority that he had made—many of us chose Bertolt Brecht as our favorite author and a personal hero.

. . .

In Luis Martin-Santos' *Time of Silence*, Pedro leads a complicated existence in 1940s Madrid. On the first of several walks he takes through the Spanish capital, the town appears, quite literally, to be a perfect container: "According to the most trustworthy statistics, people never get lost there. This indeed is the reason why this city exists (for people never to get lost). People can suffer or die but they never get lost in Madrid because each of its corners offers a well-designed room for lost persons; you cannot get lost

because a thousand, ten thousand, a hundred thousand eyes will classify and assign you a place, recognize and embrace you, identify and rescue you, allowing you to find where you belong whenever you feel completely lost" (15). As we have seen, Pedro's life gets derailed all the same. After the failed abortion attempt, the police arrest the young doctor and put him in a cell. They subject him to countless interrogations, which, in the end, persuade Pedro that he is guilty. His "salvation" occurs against a background of singularly mythological dimensions. Right before Pedro's capture, a "Taylorist" narrative sequence describes how the corpse of Florita—the victim of the failed abortion—is put into a coffin and lowered into a communal grave. Only a few days later—or is it just a few hours?—Florita's mother tells the police that her husband bears responsibility for their daughter's death and that Pedro is innocent. The coffin, "like in a film shown in reverse" (176) is brought back to the surface for an autopsy. Although the novel offers no details about the exact sequence of events, the exhumation leads to Pedro's release from jail. In spite of this fortunate turn of fate, however, his professional career has been derailed. In no uncertain terms, his academic advisor condemns him to life as a country doctor. Madrid, the perfect "container" for existence, no longer has room for him; the inner circle of the "mystic castle" (a reference to a famous seventeenth-century work by Teresa de Avila) will remain forever inaccessible (218). Even the possibility of a future life in a provincial location is linked to a specific condition, namely the inner emptiness that he feels: "I sense no attack of despair because I am empty, because they have washed my guts from inside, then dried me well, and hung me up on a string in a kind of anatomical museum for live specimens" (218).

The logic of existential emptiness as a condition for (we might also say: as a concession to) finding a protected space within physical and social reality is not available in Paul Celan's lyrical universe, where the dead find redemption only when they dig themselves "a grave in the breezes." In contrast, the life of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* follows logic similar to Pedro's. Early on, the protagonist receives "a gleaming calfskin briefcase" (32) as a prize at a social event organized by white people. It contains "an official looking document": "a scholarship to the state college for Negroes." The briefcase will accompany the narrator for the whole of his adolescence and then throughout the zigzagging course of his life in the black communities of New York City. When, towards the end of the novel, the

hero finds himself caught between warring factions in a Harlem gang riot, he escapes into a black hole beneath street level; from this point on, his existence is contained. Until now, he has held on to the briefcase; for some strange reason, the documents it contains become an object of desire for the parties chasing him:

> Someone hollered down the hole, “Hey, black boy. Come on out. We want to see what’s in that briefcase.”
>
> “Come down and get me,” I said.
>
> “What’s in that briefcase?”
>
> “You,” I said, suddenly laughing. “What do you think of that?”
>
> “*Me*?”
>
> “All of you,” I said.
>
> “You are crazy,” he said.
>
> “But I still have you in this briefcase!”
>
> “What’d you steal?”
>
> “Can’t you see?” I said. “Light a match.” (565f.)

After a long night’s sleep—in an attempt to improvise a torch and leave the hole—the hero starts to burn, one by one, the documents that the briefcase contains: “Well, there was only one thing to do if I was to make a torch. I’d have to open my briefcase. In it were the only papers I had” (567). When he burns these papers, the narrator loses his identity. In the process, he truly becomes an “invisible man” and fulfills, like Pedro, the condition of emptiness the city has assigned to him. Such emptiness is also necessary to inhabit a protected space:

> In going underground, I whipped it all except the mind, the *mind*. And the mind that has conceived a plan of living must never lose sight of the chaos against which that pattern was conceived. That goes for societies as well as for individuals. Thus, having tried to give pattern to the chaos which lives within the pattern of your certainties, I must come out, I must emerge (. . .). And I suppose it’s damn well time. Even hibernation can be overdone, come to think of it. Perhaps that’s my greatest social crime, I’ve overstayed my hibernation, since there is a possibility that even an invisible man has a socially responsible role to play.
>
> “Ah,” I can hear you say, “so it was all a build-up to bore us with his buggy jiving. He only wanted us to listen to him rave!” But only partially true: Being invisible and without substance, a disembodied voice, as it were, what else could I do? (581)

This is how the novel ends. The protagonist is empty—barely a “mind”—and without substance; sheltered and hibernating, he is contained by the hole he inhabits.

Similar equilibrium, where the price for survival requires renouncing the substance of one’s own body, is not available to the characters of Guimarães Rosa’s *Grande Sertao*. The “devil sleeping” in animals and things permeates the world in the novel. “Did you know that? And the devil—

which is the only name for a malign spirit—by whose orders and by what right does he go around doing as he damn well pleases? All mixed-up, he is. What wears him out, little by little—the devil inside folks—is knowing how to suffer wisely" (7). Against the background of the various scenes and dramas the novel presents, the sentence about "wearing out the devil" represents mere wishful thinking. The devil's energy is never tamed; indeed, he dwells within the objects of the material and human worlds as a principle of unrest. This is why no leitmotif in the novel is more prevalent than that of "a world out of control." For example: when Zé Bebelo, an old horseman, is put in jail, he proudly declares: "I am a prisoner, but there's something else (. . .) It is, it is the world out of control." The narrator comments: "Was this all foolishness? Not at all, for I could not see Zé Bebelo as a prisoner. He was not the kind you can hold in, something you can get a grasp on. Like quicksilver he was" (213). Obeying a certain necessity, the final scene (which also describes a battle between gangs)—the scene in which Diadorim, the narrator's hermaphrodite love, will die—features the "devil in the street, in the middle of a whirlwind" (482).

Nothing that is alive—nothing that has real substance—can ever find rest and protection in any of the vessels that command such fascination in the postwar world. Such is the law in a sphere shaped by endless desire for rest and protection. The densely descriptive prose chapters that frame the central dialogues of William Faulkner's *Requiem for a Nun* are haunted by an obsession that follows the same rule. In particular, the opening sequence about *The Courthouse (A Name for the City)* abounds in chests, locks, and arcane rules that try to preserve, secure, and order legal documents and procedures. For all that, justice is never served in the world of the South; documents disappear and formal procedures provide alibis for the true perpetrators. In more allegorical terms: the containers are all leaking; the chests and locks do not help at all. They cannot hold—or hold back—the unruly energy of Southern life. The characters have long realized as much: "'Ethics,' he said. He sounded almost startled. He said quickly: 'That's bad. How can we corrupt an ethical man?'" (491).

. . .

Günther Anders—a literary author and public intellectual born in 1902—studied philosophy with Edmund Husserl at the University of Freiburg. He

emigrated to France and, subsequently, the United States, when the National Socialists rose to power. Anders returned to Europe at the end of the war and attracted international attention when, after a visit to Hiroshima in 1958, he began a correspondence with Claude Eatherly, the pilot of the airplane that dropped the first atomic bomb on August 6, 1945. Thirteen years later, Eatherly was in psychiatric treatment at a Veterans Hospital in Texas. What dominated Anders' Hiroshima diary and his letters to the pilot was the fear of a Third World War. He pictured it as a nuclear conflagration—which seemed natural in the existential framework of the time. Since then, we have replaced this image with the (sometimes dogmatic) belief that nuclear weapons act as a deterrent—even if mankind will, for obvious reasons, never overcome their objective danger. Seen from today's perspective, the way that Anders tried to assess the historical significance of Hiroshima is more interesting than the warnings he voices. In this context, it is telling that the concept of "randomness" occupies a dominant position at the beginning of his correspondence with Eatherly. In the first letter, dated June 3, 1959, Anders states that he understands perfectly if the addressee objects to an intrusion into his private life; at the same time, however, he remarks that Eatherly's fate has become an item of concern for all humanity and therefore can no longer remain in the private sphere:

> We assure you that we hate indiscretion as much as you probably do, and therefore begin with our apologies. But in this case (. . .) indiscretion is unfortunately inevitable—if not necessary: your life has become the business of all human beings. As randomness (or whichever word we want to use for the undeniable fact) has chosen to transform your private life, the life of Claude Eatherly, into a symbol of the future, you have lost the right to resist our intrusion. It is not your fault—and it is certainly horrible—that you, among billions of humans living today, have been condemned to play this symbolic role. But things are what they are. (208)

Although this element of randomness, up to the present day, has never been used to excuse the United States, the question of national responsibility has not come up in reactions to Hiroshima either. Instead, the memory of the first use of nuclear weapons has come to represent the all-pervasive feeling that mankind is no longer (or has never been) in control of its own fate—an icon of what I have been calling "derailment of history." As such, Hiroshima initiated different debates of anthropological and cosmological import about man's place in evolution and the universe—debates that, over time, seem only to have grown in significance. The earliest point at which they overlapped occurred when they reversed the optimistic premise of Enlightenment thinking, according to which the human mind—with its

capacity for complex reasoning—will always be able to work through the challenges that confront it and, therefore, guide our actions. For example, Günther Anders—in his *Commandments for the Nuclear Age*, first published in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* on July 13, 1957—concluded that, "in the course of the technical age, the classic relation between imagination and action has been turned upside down":

> If our ancestors took it for granted that human imagination was "excessive," meaning that it would always and necessarily go beyond reality, today, the capacity of our imagination (of our feeling and our responsibility) is defeated by the possibilities our actions hold; indeed, we must accept that imagination cannot keep pace with what we are able to produce. Not only does our reason possess its (Kantian) "limits," it is not alone in being finite: this is also true of our imagination and, above all, of our capacity for feeling. (219)

The concept of the "unimaginable" assumed a new meaning here. It ceased to refer exclusively to the power of human fantasy to project realities that did not (yet) exist; now, it became an emblem of mankind's incapacity to control or assume responsibility for its own destiny. In the prologue to *The Human Condition* (which appeared the same year as Anders' manifesto), Hannah Arendt presented a structurally analogous argument for what she identified as the new relationship between science (including its technical applications) and the capacities of "our brain":

> it would be as though our brain, which constitutes the physical, material condition of our thoughts, were unable to follow what we do, so that from now on we might indeed need artificial machines to do our thinking and speaking. Should it turn out to be true that knowledge (in the modern sense of "knowhow") and thought have parted company for good, then we would indeed become the helpless slaves, not so much of our machines as of our know-how, we would become thoughtless creatures at the mercy of every gadget that is technically possible, no matter how murderous it is. (3)

A more dramatic sense of existential insecurity than what Anders and Arendt express is difficult to imagine. Even though, more than half a century later, we have grown accustomed to the feeling they articulated, it is important to remember that there was a time when, quite literally, the experience that triggered their unease was not only "difficult to imagine" but "beyond belief." After Hiroshima, however, the threats facing humanity began to exceed human fantasy—and to an extent that made the word "derailment" itself seem optimistic inasmuch as the word permits one to hope that the course of history might "get back on track." Now, the possibility of collective human self-destruction had become a permanent condition of existence.

. . .

Martin Heidegger, then, was not alone in believing that the nuclear age (*Atomzeitalter*) had brought about the most thoroughgoing and complex existential challenge of his time. Much like Arendt and Anders, Heidegger viewed the nuclear bomb the "most pressing"—but certainly not the only—condensation of the new human condition (XVI/522). With greater clarity than most other thinkers of his day, however, Heidegger identified modern science—in particular, its highly abstract (mathematical) relation to the things-of-the-world—as the deep-seated reason for new, uncomfortable, and always precarious attitudes towards the natural world. The homelessness of many Germans (both in the ethnic and the political sense of the word) that resulted from the loss of territory after the war, as well as the fact that, earlier still (in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries), millions of people had had to abandon rural existence and move to the "wasteland of industrialization," were phenomena of a particularly emblematic value to Heidegger (XVI/521). They converged, in his eyes, in the loss of "attachment to the ground" (*Bodenständigkeit*)—a word, incidentally, that must have possessed unwelcome connotations after 1945. It is possible that this equation of the contemporary existential situation with a lack of *Bodenständigkeit* underlay Heidegger's fascination, in the postwar years, with the concept of, and the potential for, "dwelling" (*wohnen*). Heidegger's description of a Black Forest farmhouse offers far more than normative values for the aesthetics of building. He refers to the farmhouse, above all, as an alternative to the threat of existential homelessness:

> Try to imagine for a moment a Black Forest Farmhouse, as it was built by country people several centuries ago. Here, the intense capacity to gather earth and heaven, immortals and mortals, into the monodimensionality of things shaped the house. It placed the farmhouse close to a mountain that protects it against the wind, and close to a spring that feeds its pasture. It has given the farmhouse that broad roof of shingles with the right angle both to bear the snow and to keep the rooms warm against the cold winds of long winter nights. It has not forgotten the alcove for the crucifix behind the table where common meals are taken, it has sacred places for the cradle and the wood of the dead (for this is their word for "coffin"); thus, it has given many generations under one roof a shape for their journey through time. (VII/172)

Descriptions like this catered to the intense contemporary need to feel contained within a protected space; they possess a pathos that may have become unbearable—and even redolent of inauthenticity—to many of us. Still, it is important to understand that Heidegger's philosophy transcends the desire for mere protection. Heidegger goes on to elaborate the idea of

the “fourfold” (*Geviert*)—the gathering of earth and heaven, immortals and mortals—that provides the conceptual structure for his description of the farmhouse. The fourfold allows Heidegger to bring matters into ontological focus; the fourfold will help us, too, to modify our relationship to the objects in our material surroundings.

In this context—I believe—Heidegger’s central concept is the void, or emptiness (*Leere*). Significantly, he does not focus on the emptiness as a container that will offer protection and shelter but on emptiness with an ontological function—that is, emptiness that gathers dimensions and things. Focusing on this aspect of the void—and, curiously, in a conversation with a Zen Buddhist (which occurred in 1958)—Heidegger found a compact way to describe his interest: “The emptiness I am referring to is not negative nothingness. If we understand emptiness as a spatial concept, then we have to say that it is precisely this emptiness of space that brings together, that gathers things” (XVI/555). Heidegger’s essay on *The Thing* develops the idea more fully. Here, one cannot help but be struck by the object he chooses to illustrate what a “thing” is. Yet another time in the intellectual world after 1945, the example turns out to be—a jug (*Krug*). As Heidegger stresses from the outset, what gives the jug the quality of a thing is its status as a container (*Gefäss*): “As a container the jug is a thing” (VII/169). What matters about the jug-as-a-container, however, is its emptiness. This aspect is more important than the material from which it is made or its practical use value: “The thingness of the container does not reside in the material of which it consists but in its emptiness, which receives” (“Das Dinghafte des Gefässes beruht keineswegs im Stoff, daraus es besteht, sondern in der Leere, die fasst”) (VII/171). In characteristic fashion, Heidegger mainly “reflects on intuitions” instead of “developing arguments” and tries to show how the jug, as a container, is capable of gathering the various dimensions of the fourfold: “The gift of the pouring is a gift inasmuch as it creates stasis between earth and heaven, immortals and mortals. But stasis is not the mere perseverance of something present-at-hand. Stasis is the event of assigning to each thing what is proper to it (“Verweilen ereignet”). It gives to each of the four dimensions what is proper to them” (VII/175). Once again, what matters about the thingness of the jug as a receiving vessel is not the potential for protection and shelter. Instead, what matters is its capacity to bring into focus the ontological qualities of the objects that surround us. For example, it is the earthen materiality of the jug—but also

the relation of the water that it contains to the sky, the connection with human *Dasein* that it presupposes, as well as the (different) presence of the immortals. A "simple" jug brings all these dimensions into focus.

In the *Letter on Humanism*, which he wrote immediately after the war, Heidegger had made it clear that recuperating the ontological dimension of Being was, in his eyes, the only way to overcome homelessness: "Given the essential homelessness of mankind, its future destiny reveals itself to lie in the finding of Being" (IX/341). In the same train of thought, and in reference to Friedrich Hölderlin, Heidegger emphasizes that the decisive dimension for the unconcealment of Being is language ("language as the house of Being"). In a similar move (which seems to have occurred without reference to Heidegger), Carl Schmitt, in a diary entry dated December 24, 1947, stated that the formal aspects of lyric poetry offer a privileged dimension where the noumenal can be conjured up. In this context, Schmitt makes the claim that a void—emptiness—is necessary; emptiness can exist as an effect of lyrical form:

> Meter is a practice of magic. But there must be a gap between meter and meaning in the sense of thoughts and matters of reference. To say it in the most banal fashion: there is an empty space between form and content. In this interval, which remains empty, the noumenal is set into motion (. . .). The noumenal dimension of the poem does not lie in its sound but is set into motion through this emptiness; not that the noumenal *is* this emptiness, but it is set into motion there; emptiness is the condition for this motion, so that a specific relation exists between the noumenal and emptiness; the emptier the more pure the container (*Gefäss*). Meter is the empty container not of the contents but of this magical motion. (68f.)

In the final weeks of 1947 and the first weeks of 1948, Schmitt seems to have been particularly fascinated by the relationship between emptiness and the noumenal—a relation, as we have seen, that was central to Heidegger's thought at the time. The noumenal, for Schmitt, seems to have offered, quite literally, a way to hold onto the world. If what somebody holds to is weakened or destroyed, then the person-who-holds will perish along with the noumenal:

> I concentrate, with boyish earnestness (. . .) on the magic of space. I do not really want to grasp it—and even less to produce it; but I want to know it and thus preserve it for others to come, a simple recipient. I see the final space, my grave; I see it dissolve; my home, the river, all these things are being destroyed yet I hold on to them. I will perish with them and they will perish with me. (88)

In mid-twentieth-century French literature, the works of Francis Ponge overlapped, in their focus, with Schmitt's and Heidegger's concerns about the noumenal. Through short and intricately descriptive texts in prose,

Ponge tried to conjure up objects from nature and everyday life in their "thingness." One of them, written in 1948, is about a jug (*La Cruche*). As in Heidegger's essay on *The Thing*, the central feature that Ponge elaborates is the jug's emptiness as a vessel:

> Jug is empty above all and, as soon as possible, empty again.
> Empty jug resonates.
> Jug is empty above all, and fills up singing.
> Up to the level that the water reaches, jug is empty above all, and fills up singing.
> Jug is empty above all and, as soon as possible, empty again.
> It is a mediocre object, a simple intermediary.
> To distribute water into several glasses (for example). (I/751)

What Ponge evokes as the "intermediary" function of the jug resembles what Heidegger brings out in the concept of the "fourfold": the jug gathers together different ontological dimensions and makes them communicate. As in Schmitt's reflections on emptiness and poetic language, Ponge's poem associates the jug with words: "Could one not say everything I have said about the jug also concerns words?" (I/752).

Like Celan, Ponge is impressed, above all, by the jug's fragility. It can break: "The jug goes to the water for so long that it finally breaks. It perishes from prolonged usage. Not because its material has thinned through use; rather, it breaks by accident. One could also say that it breaks due to the continuous use of its chances for survival." It is certain that Ponge's game in poetic prose unfolds within the same historical web of ontological concerns and associations that we have identified in Celan's, Heidegger's, and Schmitt's texts. Because of the author's specific preoccupation with frailness, however, Ponge's jug also displays an affinity with the bowls and cups that Michihiko Hachiya contemplates in an entry from his *Hiroshima Diary* dated August 27, 1945:

> Alone, I thought of many things. Here were the black, burnt ceilings, the walls without paint, the glassless windows. The *konro*, our small charcoal cooking brazier, stood under the sink supporting a battered and blackened teapot whose top was covered by a dish in lieu of a lid. Army rice bowls and ceremonial teacups were indiscriminately stacked in a bamboo basket. All these things recalled the pity of war. (126)

. . .

Waiting for Godot begins with "Estragon, sitting on a low mound, trying to take off his boot. He pulls at it with both hands, panting. He gives up,

exhausted, rests, tries again" (2). Estragon has slept "in a ditch," but the ditch did not afford protection:

> VLADIMIR: (*hurt, coldly*): May one inquire where his highness spent the night.
>
> ESTRAGON: In a ditch.
>
> VLADIMIR: (*admiringly*): A ditch! Where?
>
> ESTRAGON: (*without gesture*): Over there.
>
> VLADIMIR: And they didn't beat you?
>
> ESTRAGON: Certainly, they beat me.
>
> VLADIMIR: The same lot as usual?
>
> ESTRAGON: The same? I don't know.
>
> VLADIMIR: When I think of it . . . all these years—but for me . . . where would you be . . . (*Decisively*). You would be nothing more than a little heap of bones at the present minute, no doubt about it. (2f.)

Vladimir and Estragon live in a landscape that does not permit concealment. Although they are mostly alone—together—privacy is impossible. They are alone and exposed indeed—exposed to nothing, which never arrives. At one point in the middle of their boredom, Vladimir has the idea that they could "play at Pozzo and Lucky" (82). The suggestion prompts Vladimir to hallucinate—as often occurs—that Godot is arriving "at last"; moreover, he imagines that they are "surrounded." "Your only hope left is to disappear." But even this much—which is hardly anything at all—even disappearing from the imagined presence of others proves impossible:

> ESTRAGON: Where?
>
> VLADIMIR: Behind the tree (*Estragon hesitates*). Quick! Behind the tree. (*Estragon goes and crouches behind the tree, realizes he is not hidden, comes out from behind the tree*). Decidedly this tree will not have been the slightest use to us. (83f.)

If the tree is too thin—and the ditch too flat—to protect his existence, Estragon's boots are too tight for his feet. The ground on which he and Vladimir walk is too dry for bare feet, but their boots torture them. This is why Estragon wants to take them off, as early as the first scene. When he finally succeeds, he wants to leave them "there":

> VLADIMIR: At last! (*Estragon gets up and goes towards Vladimir, a boot in each hand. He puts them down at edge of stage, straightens and contemplates the moon.*) What are you doing?
>
> ESTRAGON: Pale for weariness.
>
> VLADIMIR: Eh?
>
> ESTRAGON: Of climbing heaven and gazing on the likes of us.
>
> VLADIMIR: Your boots, what are you doing with your boots?

ESTRAGON: (*turning to look at the boots*): I am leaving them there. (*Pause*). Another will come, just as . . . as . . . as me, but with smaller feet, and they'll make him happy.

VLADIMIR: But you can't go barefoot!

ESTRAGON: Christ did.

VLADIMIR: Christ! What has Christ got to do with it? You are not going to compare yourself to Christ!

ESTRAGON: All my life I have compared myself to him. (57)

Later on, Estragon shows his bare foot to the companion ("triumphantly"). Vladimir exclaims: "There's the wound! Beginning to fester!" (74). This occurs where Estragon had left his boots earlier; now, he finds they have been replaced by a different pair. Since Estragon does not understand what is happening, Vladimir must explain: somebody who also had boots that were too tight must have taken Estragon's because they fit him, and he left his own boots in exchange. However, since the feet of the other party must necessarily have been smaller than Estragon's, the new boots should be even tighter; that is, they should fit Estragon even less well than his own.

In a poem from 1953, three years before his death, Bertolt Brecht mentions "comfortable shoes" in a list of *Pleasures* (*Vergnügungen*) that make everyday life better; others include "rediscovering an old book," the "newspaper," "snow," "the change of seasons," "swimming," and "taking a shower" (X/1022). All these pleasures are modest—they are pleasures that only a world like Estragon's and Vladimir's would deny—and do not come close to producing the sensation of a stable home. Their value seems to lie, precisely, in the fact that such pleasures are possible even in situations of homelessness. And Brecht feels homeless. It seems as impossible to him to make a new city his home as it would be for one snail to use another shell: "The houses here have something of snail-shells to me. One does not think of them separately, as homes for any snail in particular. For me the problem is not a lack of cities without people in them; people without their cities are the problem (. . .) Places of childhood memories, farms where boys built cabins with leaves, the concrete deck next to the river, good for sunbathing" (XX/311). Under National Socialism, all of these spaces vanished for Brecht; he would never again enjoy the stable, protected domain of home. In one of Brecht's last plays, *Herr Puntila*, rural Finland seems to present the mirror image of this experience. Whenever Puntila is drunk, his house becomes a comfortable home for all his servants and friends. When sober, on the other hand, Puntila turns into an aggressive capitalist monster who exploits their labor.

Needless to say, the ubiquitous dream of stable containers for existence assuring an environment for individual happiness remained largely unfulfilled. Very few moments in the precariousness of the postwar world—which were always transitory—made life feel as if it were wrapped in warmth and affection. The desire voiced for such an improbable and transitory moment makes Edith Piaf's song *Milord* emblematic of its time:

> Come on with me, Milord,
> and sit at my table.
> The weather is cold outside,
> here we are comfortable.
> You can relax, Milord,
> and you can be at ease,
> unload your sorrows on my heart
> and leave your feet on my chair.
> I do know you, Milord,
> you have never seen me,
> I am but a girl of the harbor,
> a shadow of the street.

. . .

The train that takes Doctor Zhivago's family to the East never gets derailed as it makes its way to the empty landscape of the Urals, where the contours are fainter and the stakes lower (by far) than in post-revolutionary Moscow. However, wherever the new state establishes its presence, time feels "apocalyptic"—as if it were headed towards a "Last Judgment." "This is a time for angels with flaming swords and winged beasts from the abyss," says Strelnikov, who is charged with imposing the Party order far away from the political center. Speaking to Yuri Zhivago, he continues: "not for sympathizers and loyal doctors. However, I told you you were free, and I won't go back on my word. But remember, it's for this once. I have a feeling that we'll meet again, and then our conversation with be quite different" (252). With the power of the Party fading into the distance, certainty returns that "man is born to live, not to prepare for life. Life itself, the phenomenon of life, the gift of life, is so breathtakingly serious" (297). Even a hint of hope is possible: "Somewhere, life is still going on; some people are happy. Not everyone is wretched. This justifies everything" (223). The perspective here (concerning the years following the October Revolution) surfaces again in the final scene of the novel—that is, in a scene that plays in a different historical world. From a high-rise building,

two of Doctor Zhivago's descendants look down on the post-1945 capital of the Soviet Union—the capital of the State that contributed decisively to victory over Hitler through an unprecedented loss of human life. Both protagonists feel that the events of the previous decade have not entirely made good on the promises of the Marxist philosophy of history. On the other hand, they realize that the fortunes of the world and their country have greatly improved:

> Although victory had not brought the relief and freedom that were expected at the end of the war, nevertheless the portents of freedom filled the air throughout the postwar period, and they alone defined its historical significance. To the two old friends, as they sat by the window, it seemed that this freedom of the soul was already there, as if that very evening the future had tangibly moved into the streets below them, that they themselves had entered it and were now part of it. Thinking of this holy city and of the entire earth, of the still-living protagonists of this story, and their children, they were filled with tenderness and peace, and they were enveloped by the unheard music of happiness that flowed all about them and into the distance. (519)

As we know from Pasternak's biography, such a view of history (and of the political implications to be drawn from it) did not stand close enough to the official Party line—which is quite surprising, given how realistic and even positive the novel's assessment of the postwar situation appears. The difference between the Marxist philosophy of history and Pasternak's sentences does not concern content so much as tone. Words like "tenderness," "happiness," and "holy city"—in lieu of "progress" or "science"—may have struck the authorities as "bourgeois."

If we take the final sequence in the novel to express the author's own reaction to the experience of the war, then Pasternak appears to occupy a position close to the one that Albert Camus progressively elaborated after 1950. Camus moved from a critique of only Fascism to a more complex argument that condemned any ideology abstract enough to justify human death by idealistic goals or the promise of attaining remote visions in the future. From this point of view, a discourse like that of Pasternak's Strelnikov—who wants to measure the present and shape his actions from the vantage point of a "final judgment" in history—becomes as unacceptable as Adolf Hitler's apocalyptic ecstasy, in the days preceding his own suicide, that the German people merited collective death. In Camus' words: "This logic culminates in collective suicide. Its most impressive manifestation was provided by the Hitlerian apocalypse in 1945. To destroy oneself was nothing for the madmen in their bunkers who were

getting ready for a death in pompous pathos. What mattered to him was not so much to destroy himself but to drag along an entire world" (19).

According to Camus, the dissolution of all stable values was responsible for the murderous ideologies of the twentieth century: "If you do not believe in anything, if nothing makes sense to you and no position has any value, then anything becomes possible and nothing matters. Then, there is neither 'for' nor 'against.' You can dream up crematories or dedicate yourself to taking care of lepers. The difference between maliciousness and virtue becomes random, an arbitrary choice" (17). The firmness of Camus' critique is one thing, but it is another matter altogether to find values and a stable position from which to act. After all, the attitude according to which "nothing makes sense" corresponds exactly to the definition of "absurdity" he had embraced—to worldwide acclaim—in postwar Existentialism. The "revolt" against "power and History" that he finally endorsed suggests that one focus on what is available and at stake at each given moment. History cannot be derailed at all when judgment and action abandon the vast horizons of past and future that, from the early nineteenth century on, have been used and abused to give legitimacy to mass murder:

> Each of us says to the other that he is not God; here Romanticism ends. At this moment in time when each of us must draw his bow and seek evidence again, we have to conquer one more time, within and against History, what we already possess: the dire harvest of our fields, the faint love of this land; at this moment when man will finally be born, we have to leave behind our century and its adolescent rages. The bow is tense, its wood is nearing the breaking point. From this highest tension the energy of a new, straight arrow will come, from an exertion whose rigor and freedom cannot be surpassed (382).

Here, Camus is visibly struggling to describe his new position, which lacks both conceptual roundness and all-encompassing philosophical abstraction. His insistence on the incomparable relevance of each moment in its uniqueness and concreteness reminds me, to a certain degree, of the new tone Pasternak adopts in assessing the movement of history and, even more, of Pasolini's vow for a different modernity—the modernity of the People's experience. But the impression Camus, Pasternak, and Pasolini shared—of history having been derailed—did not find a particularly strong resonance in the 1950s, and it all but disappeared from the intellectual and political horizons of the following generations. This may be one of the reasons why Camus' philosophy is currently experiencing a renaissance.

. . .

As no balance was ever struck between the experience of (multiple) derailment(s) and the longing for structures that offered existential shelter, the world of the mid-1950s seemed filled with isolated events, phenomena, and remnants presenting the often ironic—and sometimes tragic—aftermath of earlier situations of hope and despair. On November 3, 1957—four days before the fortieth anniversary of the October Revolution and only a few months after *Sputnik I*—the Soviet Union launched a satellite containing Laika, a female stray found on the streets of Moscow, into orbit around the Earth. Laika probably died only a few hours later from overheating and stress. Her cadaver continued to circle the planet until, on April 14, 1958, *Sputnik II* disintegrated when it reentered the atmosphere over the Caribbean.

The launch of the satellite took place one day less than a year after the invasion of Hungary by the Red Army. The operation—which, while ultimately successful, was to prove costly in political and ideological terms—involved breaking a national independence movement that, in its first stage, had forced the pro-Soviet government to resign. Even more than in the Cuban Missile Crisis a few years later, a military response on the part of Western allies seemed certain; this prospect—perhaps with greater intensity than ever before or since—evoked worldwide fear of a Third World War with nuclear arms. At the time, my only sister was four months old. I remember my mother saying, as she nursed her (and in a slightly forced tone of seriousness), that she should never have brought another baby into a world so incapable of securing peace.

As for other ways to interpret the past, the Hegelian and Marxist approach seems to have reached a low point of popularity during the 1950s—between the Existentialism of the postwar period and the so-called "Student Revolution" of the late 1960s. The Romanist Werner Krauss—a former student of Erich Auerbach who had been sentenced to death in the Third Reich but survived the war—decided, in the late 1940s, to live in Socialist East Germany. Later, as the author of both scholarly works (above all, on the French Enlightenment) and two outstanding novels, he would win a number of national awards. Yet even Krauss—in a diary entry about a potential literary project—felt free to treat the Marxist philosophy of history in an ironic fashion—indeed, to invert it altogether:

> Topic for a novel: after an ending of the world, people notice that, instead of continuing to move forward, time irreversibly goes backward. Whereas age is considered the privileged period of life,

> youth means approaching the immediacy of death. A slow vanishing of civilization. But who keeps the memory of the "past" goals? Everything just looks chaotic. (174)

To be sure, this was but an idea for a work of fiction—yet it seems to convey how "scientific" predictions of necessary progress had lost much of the self-evidence and authority they once enjoyed.

Already in 1950, Gottfried Benn wrote a poem entitled *Still Life*, which treated formerly popular motifs of existential affect with the quiet irony of stasis and distance:

> time has assumed a stillness,
> the hour is breathing
> over a jug,
> it is late, all punches are pulled,
> with just a bit of infighting and holding left over,
> there is the end of the round—I will offer the world
> as a present to whoever finds it is enough, for enjoyment. (387)

"Time has assumed a stillness"—the stillness of the kind of painting we call "still life," which presents objects ("a jug," for example) in detail and without any function or background tension. Those things are there to be enjoyed if anybody wants to. Any possible relation to the course of history, all prognostication about the future, has ceased to matter. Only some "infighting"—and "holding"—is still occurring. Something has come to an end.

No Mourning Possible (*Kann keine Trauer sein*) is one of Benn's last works. He sent it to *Merkur*, a magazine whose editors had been sufficiently daring to print his poems in the immediate postwar years, when Benn was viewed negatively because of the support he had voiced for National Socialism in 1933 (today, we know his enthusiasm for the movement was extremely short-lived). Benn dated *No Mourning Possible* January 6, 1956. He wanted the text to appear on his seventieth birthday, on May 2, 1956. This would mark the work as an event occurring in the same German cultural space where, only recently, a "miraculous" economic recovery (*Wirtschaftswunder*) had begun. *No Mourning Possible* is about the beds in which great figures of German literature from the past century and a half had died: Stefan George, Rainer Maria Rilke, Friedrich Hölderlin, and Annette von Droste-Hülshoff (a late-romantic poet from Westphalia who spent the final years of her life in a small castle in Meersburg, on Lake Konstanz). All of these poets and thinkers may—or may not—have felt secure at the moment of death as they lay in their beds. However, existential

feelings of this sort—and memory of them—had become “pointless” in a present that Benn called a state of “eternal disintegration”:

> In that small bed, almost the bed of a child, Annette Droste died
> (it can be seen at her museum in Meersburg),
> Hölderlin on this sofa in his tower at a carpenter’s house,
> Rilke, George probably in Swiss hospital beds,
> in Weimar Nietzsche’s big black eyes
> were lying on a pillow
> until his final glance—
> all garbage now or not even there anymore,
> indefinite, pointless,
> in eternal disintegration, free of pain. (476)

The sentiment here stands as far away from the desperate hope for “a grave in the sky” voiced in Celan’s “Death Fugue” as it does from the spirit of progress—and the ascendant “clear conscience” about the past—that now fueled the German “Economic Miracle.”

CHAPTER 6
EFFECTS OF LATENCY

In the 1950s, the Western (capitalist) and the Eastern (communist) "blocks" emerged and began to divide the map of the planet between themselves with a singular determination—as if they were playing a game of chess. This game was attended, of course, by real political tension that occasionally erupted into military confrontations (without, for all that, ever turning into a full-scale Third World War, with nuclear arms). At the same time, the world population seemed to be fast moving away from what had been the most devastating experience of history. The most significant difference between the years after 1945 and the period following the First World War was how easy it was—or, at any rate, how easy it seemed—to leave the past behind, and not just intellectually.

The previous three chapters have described an array of cultural situations in the decade after the Second World War as a dimension of that period's *Stimmung*. Before turning to the decades that connect the immediate postwar years and the twenty-first century (which will occur in the following—and concluding—chapter), I would like to summarize and synthesize what we have discovered and examined until now in more abstract—that is, in more conceptually structured—terms. Three general observations strike me as fundamental. In the first place: despite obvious local differences, it is possible—and perhaps even important—to understand the post-World War II situation as a "global" situation *avant la lettre*. The Western and Eastern blocks, victorious and defeated nations alike, and—most curiously—even some countries that were not intensely involved in military operations (Brazil and Spain have been my test cases) all became part of one astonishingly homogeneous—apparently "global"—network of challenges, concerns, and tentative solutions. (Needless to say, such joint challenges, concerns, and tentative solutions all emerged—and were encountered—in ways specific to different cultural constellations.) Indeed, I would like to make the empirical claim that the three configurations presented in the last three chapters can be seen to form a global cultural web with specific historical contours. Despite all the

progress and changes that may have occurred in the interim, this form has preserved its basic shape until the present—the gray legacy of a past one encounters constantly, even if one never sees it clearly. In other words: this legacy seems to have descended upon our present, yet it also forms part of the present; it obsesses us even if—or precisely because—we can only experience the form it has assumed vaguely, and rarely in a direct way. The status and the dimensions of "subjectivity," for example—that is, the nature of the central figure of self-reference for Western "man"—has not come into greater focus now than it first had when phenomenology set out to define it in the years after 1900. Instead, the notion has only grown increasingly problematic over time.

Secondly—and here lies another difference between the scenarios that emerged after the two World Wars—the themes, provocations, and tasks articulated after 1945 were, in general, not experienced as anything new or even surprising, but as problems left over from earlier times whose long-standing importance was now simply reaffirmed. As I have already observed, this holds true especially for the many epistemological issues involving (among many other things, of course) the status of subjectivity, cognition, and action. Occasionally, breakthroughs did occur—for example, when Jean-Paul Sartre presented his argument about the existential centrality of "bad faith" in *Being and Nothingness*—but a growing feeling of impatience and frustration about the scarcity of solutions in sight was more characteristic of the period in question than true innovations of culture.

Thirdly—and here I would like to avoid the kind of misunderstanding that typifies the dominant intellectual mode of humanistic inquiry—the three cultural configurations of the postwar that I have described ("No Exit/No Entry," "Bad Faith/Interrogations," and "Derailment/Containers"), even if they fit together and yield a global horizon of reference, are not sufficiently complementary or mutually adapted to be called a "system." Of course, they overlapped constantly and "interacted" (so to speak). These contacts, however, were intermittent and, moreover, strongly marked by particular, local circumstances; consequently, their joint effect (should any exist at all) produced something more like a general congestion than the regular confluence of different movements. Nothing came together smoothly after 1945. Yet another way, then, to characterize the combined effect of these three configurations—perhaps the image closest to everyday

modes of expression—would be to call it a “labyrinth” or a “maze.” The labyrinth produced both a desire for departure and, at the same time, the fear that such a departure would entail departure from the earth. Thus, our retrospective look makes it clear that the strongest effect of congestion resulted from circularity (in the sense of “vicious” circularity) that happened inasmuch as none of the three configurations offered clear-cut “goals” one might achieve—or even a tangible point of departure.

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I would now like to describe the labyrinth of the postwar environment in greater detail. One main experience that was produced by the various articulations of the “No Exit/No Entry” motif involved the impression that it had become impossible to leave anything “behind” in time, which amounts to the impossibility of any event ever having occurred. Part of this impossibility took form in the (repeated) impression that borders were receding—i.e., that borders were “pushing away” any and all outside dimension(s) from the present. Now, a world that made no allowance for events and excluded transcendence (in the literal—that is, the spatial—sense of the word) steered human attention back to the planet’s surface, which led to a new awareness of the way space was structured here—an awareness that we have cultivated, since then, under different (and chiefly ecological) premises. Ultimately, however, it proved difficult to achieve convincing or consensual insights—no say nothing of “truths”—within this limited sphere; this was the case, not least, because no one could repress, bracket, or eliminate skepticism about the reliability of all human knowledge that the mid-twentieth century had inherited from the past. Therefore, the sum of the various “No Exit/No Entry” motifs led to the belief, first of all, that it was necessary to revisit and refine the cognitive capacities of the traditional Western Subject, especially as they related to phenomena accessible to empirical research (i.e., phenomena articulated in space).

I would not claim that the philosophical discovery of the basic structure of “bad faith” and concomitant arguments about the impossibility of full self-transparence occurred “in reaction” to the need to sharpen the cognitive capacity of the subject. It is true, however, that the obsession with bad faith after 1945 added dramatically to skepticism about the subject’s cognitive

range that was already there. The more successfully mankind controlled the planet, the less it seems to have trusted the knowledge that made this control possible. Different techniques of interrogation were invented, then, and the "genre" of interrogation grew in popularity in a historical attempt to strengthen both the subject's position vis-à-vis the "world of objects" outside and in relation to its own, interior sphere. But here, too, high (epistemological) hopes remained unfulfilled. Not only did more empirical approaches fail to yield stable knowledge; they also led to a devaluation of "thinking" in the tradition of "logic." No defined ideas were supposed to emerge from what Antonin Artaud—or Lucky, in *Godot*—thought. The doubly negative consequence of the "Bad Faith/Interrogation" constellation may have provided an impetus for the new epistemological gesture that grew strong in the late 1940s and 1950s. I am referring to the tendency, which was new at the time, to "let phenomena show themselves" (or, in the words of Martin Heidegger, to "let Being unconceal itself")—a way, it was hoped, to move beyond the traditional Subject/Object paradigm.

If the feeling that it was no longer possible to leave anything "behind" (or "in the past") contributed to the impression that history had been "derailed" from its predicted course, it also entailed a profound experience of existential insecurity and danger. This sensation was aggravated by individual memories of particular events during the war years (none of which, of course, compared in scope to the detonation of the atomic bomb over Hiroshima). In the previous chapters, I have connected the obsession with vessels—"containers"—to this intensified existential insecurity. For some positions of intellectual engagement—above all, those of Heidegger and Carl Schmitt—such longing for existential security merged with the philosophical project of permitting things to emerge into "unconcealment." It seems, however, that none of these reactions or the solutions proposed ever attained a comfortable level of stability. In order to fix temporality, a return was made, from the "Derailment/Containers" *topos*, to the "No Exit/No Entry" structure. More precisely: the return took place in order to overcome the rule of "No Exit," inasmuch as one can only hope to advance in time if it is possible to leave the past behind—or, conversely, in order to find existential protection somewhere (thereby overcoming the rule of "No Entry"). At this point, where the third of the cultural configurations marking the global postwar situation refers back to the first, their interaction (or at least our description of their interaction) reveals its circularity. Here, one

begins to perceive a maze-like structure formed by traces of their interplay in a historically specific mode of living life. If circularity provides one form in which the three configurations connect on the same level, this does not preclude the possibility that they may also have worked together in a more hierarchical (or "syntactic") way. Such a case—when "No Exit/No Entry" and "Bad Faith/Interrogations" occur together—generated a feeling of congestion and circularity; "derailment," on the other hand, appears to be a reaction to, or an interpretation of, this feeling—and the longing for "containers" signifies the dream of redemption from this state.

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The congested labyrinth that emerges from interaction between the three different cultural configurations is just one dimension of the *Stimmung* that dominated the decade after 1945. A related dimension, already mentioned, is the ease with which mankind seemed able to take distance from the experience of war and its *traumata* (an attitude that, even from today's perspective, seems remarkable). The historical *Stimmung* that engulfed the life of mind and body alike was constituted by the tension (although, sometimes, it was simply a matter of co-existence) between the congestion I have been trying to describe and a seemingly unproblematic readiness to depart for the future. Obviously, such easy readiness to depart followed from the Cartesian energy of modernity; as far as the atmosphere of congestion is concerned, I agree with a Brazilian colleague who has described it as "an ontology without teleology"—a leaden environment, with neither traction nor vectors, in which all distinctions tended towards collapse (including the distinction between prose that contained "arguments" and works of "fiction").

How might we associate the *Stimmung* of the postwar with latency? Above all, I wish to emphasize that multiple "effects of latency" exist—in part, because I would like to affirm and develop, in greater detail, a paradigm of latency different from the Freudian model of "repression." I am not sure we will ever be able to say what, exactly, remained latent in the years following 1945, whereas one would expect as much from the interpretive scheme of repression. (At any rate, I would claim that one cannot say much about what remained latent from the historical position that this book addresses—i.e., the years from the mid- to late 1950s.) It may

well be that an effect of latency—the impression that something had remained "hidden" or "in the dark"—was the point of accumulation and convergence for multiple forms of experience and perception, and that it emerged when the three cultural configurations we have observed entered a state of congestion. (This would be a first level of "latency.") One had paradoxical impressions that certain things could not be "left behind" because they vanished so quickly, while others remained "inaccessible"; the self would never become "fully transparent," and no environment would ever offer complete protection and shelter. Together, these impressions produced an effect of latency—and, with it, the aforementioned "ontology without teleology."

Between the mid-1950s and our present day, many historical moments have seemed to suggest that what lies latent is finally being set free and brought into the open. However, they have all proven deceptive. I will speak about some of these moments in the next and final chapter. Before doing so, I should point to another historical dimension of the latency effect after 1945—one that concerns the simultaneity, within the *Stimmung* of the time, of feelings of congestion and easy forward movement. Forward movement was easy in the West because of rapid—and enormous—economic expansion; it was easy in the East because Communism has never felt responsible for the ills of the past, so the possibility of "moving on" is taken for granted. Movement forward was easily synchronized with all kinds of historicizing discourses and concepts—that is, with discourses and concepts that held that time would continue to be an inevitable agent of regular change and transformation. In this spirit, the reverse of the permanent threat of nuclear war was an initial impression that peace was indeed possible—that it could be negotiated by the victors of the war and dramatically change the world for the better. Peace of this kind never lay within reach, however. Rather, its absence provided a condition for the emergence of the Cold War—and the Cold War ultimately offered a more stable structure for preventing conflict on a global scale than any peace treaty of the preceding centuries. Security was established as a cynical paradox.

On the other hand, circular movement between the three cultural configurations was incompatible with historicizing worldviews. I will suggest, later, that it included, for a good half century, the possibility of a different, non-historicizing "construction of time"—that is, of a new

“chronotope”—and that this new chronotope was “hibernating,” so to speak. Only now, in the early twenty-first century, has it begun to show itself slowly. Our renewed fascination with the works that Albert Camus wrote after 1950, for example, is a symptom of the changed situation. More than any of his contemporaries, Camus rejected the historicizing chronotope as an outdated, lazy, and ultimately dangerous framework for thinking. Here, on a second level, latency would refer to the specific feeling produced, from the 1950s on, by the emergence of a new chronotope (or by the vague perception of its emergence)—a chronotope that could not yet be fully apprehended because it was covered by other, more familiar structures of time that both the capitalist and the communist worlds recycled constantly.

The historical moments between the mid-1950s and today to which I will now turn involve the illusion, which was experienced repeatedly, that one had unearthed what had remained latent and refused to show itself for so long. In historical sequence, these moments form a genealogy according to which latency forms the origin of our present. The rhythm that emerges from their mute succession has nothing to do with the vectorial time of the historicizing chronotope. Rather, it is a form of time structured by the reiterated certainty that “something” has finally been released by a phenomenon that no one has witnessed before. Such a temporality of latency resembles—at least from my perspective—the “History of Being” that Heidegger imagined in an attempt to provide a framework for the “events of truth” (or moments of the “unconcealment of Being”) that he awaited desperately. For this reason, the title of my final chapter poses a question: “Unconcealment of Latency?”

CHAPTER 7

UNCONCEALMENT OF LATENCY?

My Story with Time

At some point in late summer, 1958, my mother's father died. I believe he was sixty-two years old—at any rate, he was not older. (His daughter can no longer confirm the year of his birth, as she now lives in a cloud of dementia.) For many years—indeed, as far back as I could remember—my parents had been conducting with him a never-ending conversation about "solutions" to his chronic heart problems. Many visits to renowned specialists at the university hospital in my hometown were made, and there were also extended stays at health resorts famous for their restorative waters. A few "miracle workers" were even involved. One of them, for a hefty fee, recommended that my grandfather continuously chew gum. He soon abandoned this therapy, and his decision left me with a private reserve I greatly appreciated. I imagined that my grandfather's heart looked worn-out and weak in the end—like the toy steam engine from my father I used to love playing with. My grandfather died at one of the spas—a place he had grown fond of. My grandmother—his third wife and my mother's stepmother—had not accompanied him there. She used the arrival of her husband's coffin at the cabin in the forest, where we had all gathered, to broadcast the standard widow's lament: "Who would have thought, Hans, who would have thought you would come back like this! Oh, too early, much too early!" she cried before shuffling off, leaning on her very short (and overweight) brother's shoulder for support. If my grandmother really meant what she said, she was quite alone in experiencing the situation with such dramatic intensity: half a century ago, sixty-two was not an unusual age to die.

I had begun to sense that my grandfather—by far the favorite relation of my childhood years—was more than physically exhausted. I could no longer see the aura of success and wealth that I wanted him to exude. I also caught a few of the words exchanged during one of the ugly fights that often erupted between my grandmother and my mother—even on the day of the funeral—about a certain sum that, due to problems of "cash flow," my

grandfather had wanted to borrow from my parents (who, at that time, had just begun to earn a solid income). It seems his daughter and son-in-law refused; their ungrateful attitude was rewarded when they inherited an old apartment building in Düsseldorf that they then sold for exactly one hundred thousand marks (which was probably a sizeable amount of money in those days). During the funeral, in the graveyard of the village where he was born, I noticed, for the first time and with a certain sense of guilt, that death—even the death of someone who had mattered in my life—made less of an impression on me than I thought it should. For the next four or five years, I frequently returned to the cabin to spend time with my grandmother, who had taken over her late husband's affairs. She operated his business with surprising success. It was also surprising that she began to play the role in my life that he had performed with such strangely distant tenderness. Only once or twice did I visit his grave, where a stone of almost monumental dimensions had been placed, bearing his name in gold letters. Although my grandfather was so frightened by the thought of his death that we were not even allowed to use the word in his presence, he had left a handwritten will which—among other, more practical things—described exactly what he wanted his grave to look like. One part of the past was now gone—a world that I wanted to picture as glorious, of which I would gladly have been a part; as I entered adolescence, its horrifying aspects soon dawned on me.

Meanwhile, I had started the first grade of *Gymnasium*, encountering—albeit less dramatically—the same problems and disappointments (disappointments, above all, for my extremely ambitious parents) that I had experienced in elementary school. I was most drawn to a teacher of Latin and German who seemed more strict—some of his colleagues liked to describe him as "sadistic"—than he was pedagogically systematic, who spoke with the earthy and softly melodic accent of the erstwhile German minorities in Eastern Europe. Sometimes he surprised us, his ten-year-old students, with nebulous remarks about "historical injustice" and "unfinished national agendas." Unlike his colleagues, however—and unlike my parents—he was vocally supportive of what I can now identify as the "reeducation" imposed by the Americans (the measures went so far as to regulate the election of the principal), which most other teachers openly derided him. More than anyone else, it was Dr. Kurt Fina who awakened my desire to know about—and to imagine myself a part of—the past. In this

case, it involved Roman antiquity. Although he had no right to make us follow his instructions, I still remember the tone of his voice when he recommended that “strong” students buy, for the Latin class, an etymological dictionary called *Der kleine Stowasser* (today, the volume still stands on a shelf behind my desk), as well as a book of source texts from everyday Roman culture called *Res Romanae*. Dr. Fina’s colleagues, in contrast, spent their time cultivating the roles, affectations, and even the attire of an earlier age—the time “before the war,” which, when they spoke, sounded like the only time that had ever really existed. Dr. Herbert Wilhelm, the mathematics teacher, for example, proudly recounted his adventures as a military pilot (even though he had also composed two operettas); the biology teacher, Walter Menth, would modestly boast of his glory days as a local soccer star (he didn’t know much biology). Our teachers also tried to make us feel how they were not quite allowed to express what they truly wanted to say—for example, when my geography instructor, Hans Morgenroth, shared an unforgettable piece of wisdom: “We all know, boys—even if the textbooks don’t say it anymore—that an Asian person is happy with a handful of rice per day.” More than in direct descriptions, then, the “real” world from “before the war” was made present—in latent form—through various kinds of allusion, most of which escaped unnoticed.

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And so I grew up with the expectation that, one day, something crucial would become clear, although I did not know—or maybe I believed I did not already know—what kind of thing it might be. To live in the certainty of a presence that has no identity is to live in a state of latency. If I am not altogether mistaken, many of my classmates—and many young Germans of my generation—shared the feeling, vague yet certain at once, that the future held a decisive moment of unconcealment in store. For me, personally, it had all begun with the glory I had imagined my grandfather to possess, but which never really materialized before my eyes; it continued with the resentment—perhaps even a hidden agenda—that I sensed in the way my teachers talked. I believe it was a feeling of this kind that produced the specific tonality of the 1968 student revolt in Germany: we wanted to confront our parents because we were sure that they were holding

something back that we didn't know about (even if, at the same time, we pretended to know what it was).

This attitude towards the past determined the relationship we entertained with the future as a dimension of existence. The future inherited from the nineteenth-century concept of "History" (*Geschichte*) looked like a future one could choose—and determine the course of—through willed action. For those born after 1945, it also became a future that held a revelation in store, even if its date—and mode—of arrival we felt we could not predict. At first glance, it was this "expectation of the past" (already a potentially paradoxical attitude) that caused congestion—or, to employ another metaphor, ripples in the smooth course of historical time extending from a past that one simply left behind, to a future that was a matter of pure choice. My encounter with time (again, I assume this was not just my experience) was a constant—and constantly frustrated—expectation that something crucial would show itself—as well as a life-long effort to adapt the visions of future and past to this repeated cycle of hope and disappointment.

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At the end of 1958, during my first months of *Gymnasium*, I probably stood somewhere between fading dreams about my grandfather's world and the desire for a different image of the past that would become my future—a vision now awakened by Dr. Fina. Today, I can see that the late 1950s were a time of apparent endings, above all—a time when the impression may have first emerged that the postwar was over. When, in 1955, James Dean died in a car crash, there vanished the face of a generation that had been frozen into eternal adolescence by the rude optimism of the new middle class. Three years after he received the Nobel Award for Literature, Albert Camus, too, lost his life in a road accident. If James Dean seems never to have overcome the sexual indecision of his early adulthood, Camus left behind a wife and twin children; he was also much more than a poster boy for the intellectual flavor of the day. Now, in the early twenty-first century, many believe that Camus' work—a legacy distinguished by lucid philosophical sobriety—could have protected entire generations against the fervor of arrogant and banal ideologies (even though Camus' contemporaries soon began to frown on his work for not being sufficiently "progressive").

What came to an end—thereby producing the impression that one was en route to the future—were the uncertainties and fears that had attended the early stages of the Cold War. In principle, the outline of the new order was visible by 1950: the United States and the Soviet Union would divide the world and "freeze" it into two zones of influence and control; in the process, they would not hesitate to cut nations and former colonial territories in two, as occurred in Korea and Germany. (Based on its colonial prehistory, Vietnam would develop in a similar way.) However, one specific fear—one that had the potential to explode into panic—remained. This was the fear that one of the two sides, by exploiting an internal weakness of the adversary, would bring about a direct military confrontation, with the logical risk of nuclear—and therefore terminal—world war. In such an atmosphere, Günther Anders waged his humanitarian campaign to keep the memory of Hiroshima alive. The events of the Hungarian Revolution in October and November 1956 would bring the mood to an end.

Under the rule of the Workers' Party, which was loyal to the Soviet Union, Hungary had fallen into a spiral of hyperinflation, economic deterioration, and famine—to say nothing of the political repression and aggressive transformation of social structures that the government, informed by an ideological imaginary, had enacted. When rapidly spreading student protests forced the government to resign in October 1956, the Soviet Union seemed ready to negotiate. On November 4, however, the Red Army invaded Hungary, making no attempt to disguise the nature of its mission and showing no constraint in the extreme violence it employed against the population. The scars of those days are still visible on the walls of old houses in downtown Budapest, where, as it happens, I am now writing these words. By November 10, 1956, all resistance had been broken. Two and a half thousand Hungarians and seven hundred Soviet soldiers had died, and more than two hundred thousand Hungarians left their land as refugees. As I have mentioned, my parents, in those days, were convinced that a new life of wealth and status, carried along by the booming German economy, had come to an end before it even really began—and that it had been morally irresponsible for them to bring another child (my sister, who was born in July 1956) into a world doomed to go under.

Although the Soviet intervention in Hungary produced fear all over Europe, American military forces—only a few hundred miles away—were not deployed. Since the internal problems of the Communist block were

obvious, and since the cruelty of the Soviet actions could not have been more blatant, there was only one conclusion to draw: given the impossibility of a peace treaty between two powers exercising absolute dominion, the potential for nuclear catastrophe was too great; the Cold War—since mankind was (and ever will be) incapable of eliminating the nuclear threat fully—had become the best possible protection from universal destruction. Mankind finally seemed ready to leave a part of the past behind. Both superpowers paid a high—but reasonable—price for the new stability. On the one hand, the American promise to protect and promote movements of national liberation and independence lost much of its credibility. But for intellectuals worldwide, who had traditionally found themselves compelled—often for philosophical reasons—to support the spread of Socialism and Communism, it became much more difficult to support the Soviet Union.

Less than five years after the repression of the Hungarian Revolution, on the morning of August 13, 1961, as my family ate breakfast on a lake near the Bavarian Alps, the news broke that—under the "protection" of the East German police and military—a wall had been hastily erected to seal the Soviet "sector" of Berlin off from the three "sectors" under Western control. This time, the reasons for the intervention—which violated previous agreements between nations—were chiefly economic; they had become pressing as a consequence of a flaw in the logic concerning the status of the former capital. Officially, all of Berlin was considered a special case within East Germany. As such, the city reproduced the postwar division of the entire country. In other words: the city was divided into four parts, each of which stood under the administration of one of the formerly "Allied" powers. Within Berlin, however, people could move freely between the four "sectors," which meant that East Germany contained an open exit that could not be protected like a border; and through this exit, growing numbers of East German citizens (mainly doctors, lawyers, and highly skilled workers) were leaving the socialist state for the Western world. It was an altogether plausible decision to transform this problem into a "no exit" situation and thereby prevent the possible breakdown of the East German economy—even if it gave the American side another ideological edge in the Cold War.

After we heard the news that morning, my father—who, strangely, but in a manner almost typical of a German man born around 1920, always took the Soviet side in political conversations—mumbled that East Germany

would have done much better to keep all its borders closed from the very start. My mother—as always—was impatient to get to her deck chair and work on her summer tan. The owner of the hotel—like Mr. Kellerman, his counterpart in the American film, *Dirty Dancing*—was relieved to see that the vacation mood had not been spoiled; wherever necessary, he eagerly agreed with all the many opinions that were voiced. Once again, there was much talk, on radio and TV, about how the Eastern block was gambling with the possibility of nuclear confrontation. Later, I learned that, at one point, American and Soviet tanks had indeed stood facing each other as the wall went up. But no one really thought anymore that the tense situation might escalate into military action; the event only resembled the Hungarian Revolution on the surface. If anything, the construction of the Berlin Wall confirmed the unwritten and obvious rules of the Cold War.

Five years later, my classmates and I—all of us soon to be high school graduates—went on a compulsory, state-sponsored excursion to the "former national capital" (which, due to the Berlin Wall, had quickly become a tourist attraction). There, we were subjected to veritable torrents of ideological preaching presented as "civic instruction." Finally, we were individually launched, one by one—like participants in a bicycle race "against the clock"—for eight hours we were to spend walking through the Eastern part of the city, which we were supposed to "get to know." (This pattern of deployment was imposed by some arcane bureaucratic rules of the East German administration.) I was almost eighteen years old at the time, and I felt an itch (which most of my classmates did not share) to demonstrate my independence from the institutional and ideological environment in which I had grown up. Both the constraints in the East and the warnings we had received in the West made it difficult for us to feel at ease "behind the Iron Curtain." Consequently, most of my friends—more or less secretly—returned right after crossing the border. But I wanted to be different, and I made every effort to find the strangely incoherent cityscape on "the other side" beautiful. It consisted of historical monuments still awaiting repair after the destruction of the Second World War and a few jewels of Socialist architecture, mostly in Stalinist baroque. At one point, I noticed a huge poster inviting passers-by to an exhibit with an aggressively pedagogical title: "Socialist Youth Create Images of Peace" ("Sozialistische Jugend malt den Frieden"). It was an endless collection of color-pencil drawings made by children, depicting soldiers of the National People's

Army (*Nationale Volksarmee*)—complete with hand grenades and tanks. Having made an effort to believe in the good intentions of the "other side," I was frankly appalled. But when, at the exit, a notebook for "reactions" was handed to me, I found myself writing, on the grayish-brown paper, words that I believe I can still recall exactly: "As a citizen of West Germany, I congratulate the Democratic Republic of Germany on the visible success of its peace education. May it turn into the contribution to progress and lasting peace that it deserves to become." Standing between intimidation and my wish to be different, I instantly knew this was a lie, rather than an act of bad faith. There was no movement towards convergence between the two worlds of the Cold War, and it was very clear that they prescribed different codes of behavior.

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Once the Cold War achieved this definitive state of precarious "security," it must have appeared finally possible to leave behind a past that nobody wanted to talk about. Leaving behind the past was also confused with "History as such"—and with movement towards an open horizon of future possibilities from which one might choose, both collectively and individually. Inasmuch as both camps, East and West, relied on the same basic elements of this construction of time when they fashioned their images and ideals for a better future, it makes perfect sense that fierce competition arose between them (a competition that was often called "a race"). The competition concerned which side was moving into the future faster—and, in so doing, making the better choices; this rivalry also permeated every institution, from schools to television programming. For a few years, the congestion of time that had dominated the immediate postwar seemed to have disappeared, allowing an impression of progress to emerge. As far as the most conspicuous point of rivalry between the superpowers—the "space race"—was concerned, the Soviet Union still stood far ahead in 1960; the USSR had launched the first satellite in 1957. Perhaps it was also in the Soviet Union that a new feeling first arose—the sense that outer space represented a limit instead of being an exit that lay wide open.

The initial imbalance between the superpowers in the rush to space must have been one of the reasons why the United States was eager to display—

internationally, and to a far greater extent than today—the high standard of living that spectacular economic and technological development had made available to its citizens after 1945. The most successful instance occurred at the 1958 World Fair in Brussels. (The architectural symbol of the event, named the "Atomium," is still part of my visual memory from those days—not least because it reminds us that, only half a century ago, atomic energy seemed to promise a brighter future.) Another event of this kind opened at Sokolniki Park in Moscow on July 24, 1959, as the "American National Exhibition." Probably in reaction to—and in compensation for—the *Sputnik* trauma, the show, which concentrated on labor-saving and recreational devices, tried to impress Russian visitors with a futuristic vision of the average American family's everyday life. Both Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev (whose mostly jovial manners had made him the embodiment of hope for a post-Stalinist "thaw") and American Vice President Richard Nixon (who desired publicity for his candidacy in the upcoming presidential elections) attended the opening event. In the kitchen of a model suburban house—much like the one familiar to millions of TV viewers (like myself) from *Father Knows Best*, but cut into halves so it could be used as a stage—Khrushchev and Nixon engaged in a heated but not altogether unfriendly exchange. Remarkably, the governments of both the USSR and the USA found what soon became known as the "Kitchen Debate" sufficiently positive, in terms of public image, that the conversation was replayed on national television over the next few days. Nikita Khrushchev opened the conversation with the remark that, unlike America, the Soviet Union was focusing on the production of "things that matter," not luxury items. He went on to ask the Vice President whether there was a machine on display that "puts food into mouths and pushes it down." Nixon, both politely and critically, responded that the competition at hand was "only technological, not military."

Such a spirit of sportsmanlike rivalry and guarded optimism about the possibility of a convergence between the superpowers spread for a few years. In the West, it was often associated with the astonishingly relaxed manner of Nikita Khrushchev, who had grown up as a poor country boy and factory worker, and, on the other side of the proverbial table, the glamour of the Harvard-educated John F. Kennedy (who beat Richard Nixon in the 1960 presidential race). Other scenarios and protagonists of the early 1960s only strengthened our belief—both naive and wonderful—that a brighter

future lay ahead. The congenial and serene former Cardinal of Venice, as Pope John XXIII, succeeded the austere Pius XII, the pope of my childhood imagination (who, in earlier years as an ambassador of the Vatican in Germany, had negotiated mutually favorable agreements with Hitler's government). In 1959—apparently without much previous consultation—the new pope followed a personal intuition and announced the Second Vatican Council; his revisionist agenda was to open the Catholic Church to the modern world (the much-quoted title of the program—no longer in Latin—was *aggiornamento*). Meanwhile, the Israeli intelligence service had captured Adolf Eichmann in Argentina and brought him to Jerusalem; Eichmann was subsequently tried and executed on May 31, 1962, as one of the parties chiefly responsible for the deportation of millions of Jews to concentration camps. Although the trial, in terms of legal procedure, fulfilled all formal requirements, it could not avoid the appearance of a show trial. The bulletproof glass container in which Eichmann was seated at court fascinated me, for it seemed to give physical form to this ambiguity. Officially, it was supposed to protect the defendant against the rage of the victims' families. Inevitably, however, it also displayed Adolf Eichmann as the ultimate criminal. The dominant reaction—in Germany as well as Israel and the United States—was relief. To rid the world of a major agent of the Holocaust seemed to represent a way to take distance from the past—and thereby make a step towards a better future. Hannah Arendt's comments on the "banality of evil," a phrase she coined when covering the trial for *The New York*er, was a reaction to Eichmann's insistence that he had only "done his duty." Arendt's phrase contributed to the impression that the past was growing more distant: while the words were primarily meant to warn of the potential for such crimes to happen anywhere, they also toned down the morbid fascination that had kept alive the memory of the major figures of National Socialism.

Other steps in a hopeful direction took place in South America. On April 22, 1960, President Juscelino Kubitschek made Brasilia the new capital of his country. He thereby realized a national project conceived in the early nineteenth century—during the first years of Brazil's independence from Portugal—to open up and develop the interior of the country's vast territory. The new city's high modernist landscaping by Lucio Costa and the architectural design of Oscar Niemeyer were hailed as the harmonious expression of an old dream for the future, which now had become the

present. In Cuba, the previous year, another youthful and charismatic leader —Fidel Castro—had finished a six-year-long guerilla struggle, ousting President Fulgencio Batista, who had been a puppet of the Mafia and the CIA, and assuming political power on the island. Even before we began to sympathize with socialist ideology, we felt the charisma of figures like Fidel Castro and Che Guevara. Even in the United States—where foreign policy had officially supported Batista and, of course, stood opposed to the Marxist world-view—the Cuban revolution initially produced some optimistic resonances, especially among intellectuals.

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Soon, however, Cuba came to represent the first cloud in the mildly cheerful sky of the early Cold War. Immediately after his inauguration in January 1961, Kennedy re-authorized the invasion of Cuba by exiles (which was already fully planned) with massive U.S. military support. Just three months later, the operation failed miserably, lending further credibility and confidence to Castro's regime and providing him good reason to tighten his relations with the Soviet Union. Consequently, the Cuban Missile Crisis, which occurred in 1962, made the world hold its breath—especially when American reconnaissance planes detected construction sites for mid-range missiles to be installed on the island. There followed weeks of tension and threats between the two superpowers, until it was agreed that the Soviet Union would remove its missiles from Cuba and the United States would (secretly) disarm its warheads in the Mediterranean region. The asymmetry between the public retreat of the Soviet Union, on the one hand, and the invisible concessions of the United States, on the other, undermined Khrushchev's authority within the Communist Party and the Soviet government and may well have marked the beginning of his political decline. However, the long-term aftershocks of the crisis were also experienced in the United States. When, almost exactly one year later, John F. Kennedy was assassinated, rumors immediately spread that connected his death to the situation in Cuba.

When John F. Kennedy was murdered and Nikita Khrushchev, another year later, disappeared into a political exile that was officially presented as retirement, the Cold War lost the friendly faces that had charmed us so. Kennedy's much less glamorous successor, Lyndon B. Johnson, was unable

to avoid an unfortunate series of decisions, already begun under the previous administration, that ultimately dragged the United States into the Vietnam War. For me, the dramatic tension of the situation in the U.S. was embodied by the charismatic Cassius Clay, who became heavyweight champion of the world in 1964 after beating Sonny Liston in six rounds. At night, on my transistor radio, I would secretly listen when the American Forces Network broadcasted his fights live. Through Cassius Clay—who soon converted to Islam and gave himself the name Muhammad Ali—the United States reentered my life in all its greatness and ambiguity; this time, I felt the tension between racial oppression and a powerful quest for freedom, between unparalleled athletic beauty and the criminal schemes of the parties who promoted Ali's fights. Ali's provocative words and gestures, his straightforwardness and wit, and—above all—his stunning victories in the ring seemed to augur a future we would only begin to dream of a few years later. Today, it is impossible to say whether this future has arrived, for the great moments of Ali's career made us believe that we were experiencing both an accelerated pace of historical development and a "wrinkle in time" (the title of a very popular children's book by Madeleine L'Engle, published in 1962). The steps towards a fuller degree of liberty for Americans of African heritage made us think of progress; at the same time, such hard-won progress showed that the steady postwar movement towards ever-growing wealth and comfort for an ever-larger number of Americans had largely excluded social and cultural minorities—and therefore needed to be derailed.

In the meantime, dynamic beginnings and movements of transformation had come to a halt in many South American countries. When, at the age of eighteen, I had the privilege of visiting Brasilia (in 1966), the new capital still looked like a construction site. As one of the few guests in the large hotel downtown, I felt the city was empty—even if, in reality, it was already beset by demographic growth that exceeded all the projections that had guided Costa and Niemeyer. Under the presidency of Marshal Humberto de Alencar Castelo Branco, Brasilia had become the capital of military dictatorship; just as the Marshal's face represented the right-wing rule of the present, the town itself stood as a monument to the left-wing utopia the past had projected into the future. I performed my duty as a tourist by recording the present I saw, and I took thirty-six color photographs of the Niemeyer buildings (structures that are still famous today). Later, on the long and

lonesome bus ride back to São Paulo (where my Brazilian host family lived), I felt more sad than disappointed.

Moments of disillusionment like this began to make the hopes of the early Cold War years seem naïve. The fear of appearing naïve—the worst of all possible fears for an adolescent—probably explains why, like millions of other young people, I was so ready to embrace the more formal (and more explicitly ideological) worldview of the Communist side. I admired the way that Marxist philosophy described itself as "scientific." Therefore, I felt I practically had an academic obligation to join the "German Socialist Students' Association" (SDS) one day after enrolling for my first semester of study at the University of Munich, in October 1967. Whenever possible—that is, whenever the social event in question was sufficiently formal—I would wear my only sports-coat because it looked serious and allowed me to display a red button emblazoned with the profile of the party I was eager to call "Chairman Mao." We missed no opportunity to provoke our parents' generation. Above all, we wanted to confront them about the immediate German past, which most of them did not like to talk about. At the same time, I felt the urge to be intellectually orthodox and label every prejudice that I held and every value judgment that I made as "scientific." Being "scientific" implied that one might be able to control the future.

In this sense, it was by "scientific necessity" that we protested against the American intervention in Vietnam and made every effort to overlook Soviet support for the Vietcong and Ho Chi Minh's troops. The obligation to be part of regular "manifestations" in front of the American Consulate in Munich followed from the attitude of bad faith we had adopted. Therefore, it seemed like a confirmation of our favorite conspiracy theories when one day, in front of the Consulate, local police forces arrested some of us and locked us in the gym of a nearby *Gymnasium*. Waiting to be questioned, we sang *Bandiera Rossa*—the hymn of the Italian Communist Party. (Presumably, this was our choice because the existence of a large Communist Party in Italy encouraged us in our hope for a revolutionary future throughout the capitalist world.) My own imagination—which was then very vivid—immediately called up colorful images of self-immolation in the style of nineteenth-century paintings like Goya's *Cinco de Mayo* and Delacroix' *La Liberté guidant le peuple*. Then the door opened, and a police officer called my name. In my theatrical mind, "the fatal moment" seemed to have arrived, but what actually happened turned out to be a moment of

profound humiliation with long-term consequences. Laconically, the policeman told me, “Dr. Riedl has called, and you are free.” The background to this story—which is probably typical—is altogether banal and almost bureaucratic. I was studying in Munich thanks to a stipend I had received from a state organization, the *Stiftung Maximilianeum*; Dr. Riedl was the director of this prestigious institution. At the same time—and more importantly—Dr. Riedl worked as a high-ranking executive in the ministry that oversaw the Bavarian police. Although I dared not ask him about it, I am sure that Dr. Riedl, on that particular day, reviewed a list of students who had been arrested, saw my name, and promptly decided that my being a “prisoner” did not fit with the image and aura my fellowship was supposed to involve.

Although I knew at the time (and, since then, have never ceased to believe) that what had happened in this shameful incident was as obvious to my “comrades” as it was to me, I went to our SDS meeting the next day with mixed feelings, but without any sense of guilt. Soon, my worst expectations were fulfilled. I was accused of “treason” (perhaps I was even told that it was “class treason”) and instructed to engage in an exercise of Marxist “self-criticism.” After a long discussion conducted according to bureaucratic protocol, I was condemned to print five hundred copies of a poster calling for a “General Strike” on a press made for artworks. Of course, I accepted my punishment—and soon had more than enough time to let the absurdity of the situation sink in. The only reason why I had to use this particular printing device (*Siebpresse*) was that it involved a painstakingly slow process. When I handed over the five hundred posters to my Socialist superior, I knew—with the sobriety that attends deeply disappointing moments—that I was also done with revolutionary Marxism, even if it took me more than a decade to admit as much. In part, I was scared of further humiliation. But perhaps I was also apprehensive about living without a future that appeared to be clear and scientifically predictable. Above all, it seemed difficult to give up the hope of abandoning the German past as we made our way towards a Socialist future.

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In my everyday surroundings, I continued to play the role of Revolutionary Socialist that I had chosen so enthusiastically only two years earlier.

Perhaps I now displayed slightly more ideological flexibility—if so, this must have made me look even less convincing than before. For example, when the United States took the lead in the space race on July 20, 1969—the day of the first manned landing on the moon—I told my (much older and more realistic) American girlfriend from Lawrence, Kansas, that the important thing was for mankind to stay on the road to progress. Meanwhile, Willy Brandt had become the first Social Democratic chancellor in West German history, which confronted us with yet another challenge. Clearly, it seemed better to have a Social Democratic chancellor instead of another Christian Democrat, but at the same time, Brandt's party had officially decided, in 1959, to abandon the Marxist interpretation of economics. We reassured ourselves by frequently bringing up Brandt's "truly Socialist" youth, as well as the fact—much maligned by his opponents in real politics—that he had spent the years between 1933 and 1945 in Scandinavia, resisting the National Socialist regime. Brandt, we thought—like us and unlike everyone else who had lived in Germany at that time—bore no responsibility for German war crimes. Inasmuch as he was our most realistic hope for getting back on track with History, we were willing to be flexible on the finer points of our ideology. On December 7, 1970, Willy Brandt knelt down in front of a memorial for Jews deported from the Warsaw Ghetto and signed, that same day, a treaty with Poland that confirmed—definitely and officially—the borders drawn after the war. Thus ended, one more time, the postwar period. (*Time* magazine declared Brandt "Man of the Year" for 1970.) Much more important for me in existential terms—infinitely more important than the Nobel Peace Prize that Brandt received in 1971—was the question whether his genuflection in the Warsaw ghetto was spontaneous, or whether it was a calculated gesture meant to convey something in particular. For the first time, I began to perceive an atmosphere of latency in my surroundings, and I understood that the true challenge for a German like myself, born in the years immediately following the war, involved assuming personal responsibility and guilt—paradoxically, for crimes that had happened before I was born. As a hope for secular redemption, this attitude had to postpone—indefinitely—the ending of the postwar, because the logic of redemption, while implying a promise of forgiveness, leaves open when this forgiveness will occur. We thought that assuming responsibility for crimes that had occurred before our birth would, if nothing else, lend our world of latency

greater transparence. Yet at the same time, we sensed that our main concern was not really transparency. For us, there was no detail of the nation's shameful past that could not be dragged out and openly discussed in the West German public sphere.

In the fall following the landing on the Moon—and a good year before Willy Brandt's genuflection in Warsaw—I left Germany to spend two semesters studying in Salamanca, the oldest university town of Spain. I was greatly concerned that the country I had chosen still stood under the dictatorship of Generalísimo Francisco Franco, who had ascended to power, in the Spanish Civil War between 1936 and 1939, with the assistance of Adolf Hitler's military aviation. The only "political" justification I had for my decision was the academic conviction (which, at the time, was held to be politically "conservative") that a true Romanist should be familiar with more than just French culture (the preferred area of focus for most young scholars in my field in those days). The option of going to Italy—a country with a Communist Party that still seemed to be competitive in national elections—was equally available, and just as plausible in academic terms. Thus, I tried to persuade myself that my heroic support for student protest (which now, I wished to believe, was rather extensive and substantial) was needed more urgently in Spain; soon, I had all but forgotten about my efforts to fool myself—and the initial hesitation that had prompted me to attempt to do so. All the goals that began to matter during the ten months I spent in Salamanca—and they mattered intensely—were non-political in nature: learning about a culture that had not been exclusively Christian (I tried to acquire a reading knowledge of medieval Andalusian Arabic), the otherness of a social life whose rituals often seemed archaically hierarchical, the intense light of late-summer sunsets, and the dry cold of the Castilian winter. Above all, the baroque churches of Salamanca and a religiosity that had barely been touched by the mildly modernizing spirit of the Second Vatican Council reawakened—for one final (and brief) moment in my life—the desire to attend mass.

Of course, my noble intention to lend support to the Spanish student movement hardly entered into the picture at all. To make matters worse (or better), only infrequently did I feel badly about the love I experienced for this different everyday world, which belonged to a past I had not known about until then—and of which I wanted to be a part. At the corner of the narrow street leading from the beautiful neo-classicist university building

where lectures were held to the *colegio* (dorm) where I spent most of the day reading classical works of Spanish literature, there stood a madman everyone called *el loco Estéban*. Both in the "Siberian" cold (as we called it) of the Castilian winter and in the blistering sunshine of early summer, he wore a gray overcoat; his hands seemed to move back and forth in his pockets to the rhythm of four words he repeated endlessly: *a las cuatro y media*, *a las cuatro y media*, *a las cuatro y media*. Strangely, I never thought of Estéban as an emblem of time that had come to a standstill.

When I returned to Germany for Christmas that year (this was the first time I saw the strikingly "modern" design that Lufthansa aircraft still feature today)—and then, when I came back for good at midsummer—I already felt that the country was beginning to change. I hoped this was a consequence of the new political style that Brandt and his government had introduced. Now, we could envision a future no longer drawn along the lines of an ideology that I still professed, but rather a future of social justice and historical responsibility, which promised to come to terms with the national past that had long haunted us. Nothing made this brief moment of happiness more visible than the beautiful architecture, the design, and even the soft colors chosen for the 1972 Olympics in Munich, which were supposed to be "the cheerful games" (*die heiteren Spiele*) of a new Germany. The time I spent walking through the "Olympic field" about a week before the opening may have been the one day of my life when "being proud to be German" would not have sounded wrong to me. Then, in the early morning hours of September 5, 1972, the terror organization "Black September" took eleven Israeli athletes hostage. In a poorly organized rescue attempt by the German police, all the hostages and terrorists were killed. Anti-semitism had returned to German soil like a black specter from the past. Suddenly, the "cheerful games" were over, and those vague but beautiful—and, for a moment, even realistic—visions of a different future died forever—at least for me. And yet I was happy when it was decided to continue the games after twenty-four hours of mourning.

Following a landslide victory in the national elections of fall 1972, Willy Brandt stepped down as chancellor of Germany in May 1974, when the West German intelligence discovered that one of his closest advisors, Günter Guillaume, had been spying for East Germany. Today, we know that the more immediate reasons for this abrupt resignation involved internal rivalries within the Social Democratic Party and, even more importantly,

the chancellor's complete exhaustion. At that point, Brandt suffered from depression and had developed serious problems with alcohol. It was impossible for a morally responsible person—we, ex-revolutionaries without a revolutionary past, concluded—to last in the political world of capitalism. That other, non-ideological future had now vanished, and the past we could not leave behind was more painfully present than ever before. And sooner than any of us expected, the ideological future we had all claimed to believe in would return to the present and spill blood.

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On September 28, 1974, Martin Heidegger celebrated his eighty-fifth birthday in Freiburg. A few days later, he sent copies of a poem, in Gothic letters written in a slightly trembling hand, to everyone who had wished him well. The text presented the gratitude that Heidegger owed his addressees as a philosophical virtue. In those days, a distinct feeling of latency had returned, and awareness of "the presence of something inaccessible" seemed to represent precisely this:

After September 26, 1974

May all those who participate in the search for contemplation within the present age accept my gratitude for their remembrance

More grounding than poetry,
more foundational than thinking
gratitude should remain.
It will bring back
to those who come into thinking
the presence of the inaccessible
to which we—mortals without exception—
are handed over from the origin. (XVI, 741)

If, by "gratitude," Heidegger was referring to openness to, and affirmation of, the world, all that the world could offer in return was "the presence of the inaccessible." No mention was made of the unconcealment of Being or an "event of truth" (as Heidegger also called it) as a "realistic" possibility. Awareness of the inaccessible and of its presence was all that humans could expect in return for their gratitude. Heidegger's thank-you note implied a bleak view of human existence—and, equally, a bleak farewell to any relationship with the world based on understanding and empathy. Today, this poem, which he wrote a few days after his birthday, helps us realize how even Heidegger, at that point, could no longer disentangle or describe

the various layers of a world that seemed increasingly congested and lacking in direction.

Heidegger was the one philosopher not to be mentioned in the presence of the professor on whose goodwill, between early 1971 and the end of 1974, my position as *Assistent* depended at the recently founded Reformuniversität in Konstanz. My advisor was fond of making sarcastic remarks about motifs like "the piety of thinking" (which sustained, for example, the poem quoted above). He found Heidegger "too conservative" by his own political standards—and this was not even a reference to Heidegger's involvement in National Socialism. At the same time, the individual in question called for my colleagues and me to sign a "telegram of solidarity" to express support for Willy Brandt on the day of a vote in parliament that was expected to end his term as a chancellor (which Brandt subsequently survived by a dramatically narrow margin). Despite my admiration for Brandt, I refused to sign the telegram out of principle, because I believed that displays of political support should always be individual.

All in all, my advisor's distance from Heidegger and his enthusiasm for Brandt corresponded exactly to the future of our profession as he conceived it. During our first conversation (which mainly concerned the bureaucratic requirements of my hire), he honored me by saying that he found me qualified to become part of the "new Literary Criticism" that he associated with the "progressive 1960s." (In contrast, he never missed an opportunity to express his dismay at the "conservative 1970s," which threatened to bring all progress, intellectual or otherwise, to a stop.) Every book we read, every page we wrote, and every seminar we taught was supposed to contribute, somehow, to a (vague) political goal. The critical position that we wanted to represent was called "Reception Aesthetics"; its leftist pedigree was based on shifting attention from the "true meaning" of texts to the multiplicity of readings made possible by different groups (or types) of readers in different times and under different social conditions. Needless to say, my advisor found the new "paradigm" (a very popular term at the time, which was employed to gauge historical distance and merit)—to whose invention he had contributed—more "democratic" than traditional practices in our field.

One evening, though—out of personal frustration and only for a few hours—I entertained doubts about how sincerely he was committed to the

progressive cause. Employing the new paradigm—which I believed that he, more than anyone else, had developed—I had compiled a number of contrasting texts (poetry and prose, fictional and referential, contemporary and more removed in time) and submitted them to different kinds of readers (factory workers, high school students, local politicians, and others); my intention was to document and analyze the different ways they responded. I readily admit that the results I presented in our weekly "research colloquium" contained no great revelations. However, I was stunned by the contempt and aggression with which my advisor reacted. How dare I treat texts "as an empty matrix," he asked; had I not understood that our task as literary critics was to identify true and adequate meanings? My response—which was typical for the time (namely, that I found this to be a strangely "authoritarian" position for the father of reception theory)—only made things worse. "We would all like to know," said the professor, "why you believe that your work possesses democratic value." None of my colleagues, if memory serves, protested against being numbered on the side of the man on whom we all depended. For me, yet another project conceived in the best of intentions (which would also secure my professional future) died that evening.

A decade later, as a young professor at the University of Bochum, I felt little surprise—just physical repulsion—when it was revealed that Hans Robert Jauß, our exceedingly progressive advisor and the champion of the Left, had enjoyed a successful career as an SS-officer. (To what heights he rose, precisely, will never be known, due to his persistent lying and cover-up strategies.) None of us had anticipated such a revelation. I simply realized—one more time—how I had grown accustomed to a past that, over and again, caught up with me; now, because of the particularly close relationship, in the German academic tradition, between student and *Doktorvater*, I felt contaminated. While most of my former colleagues at Konstanz engaged in generous exercises of understanding and forgiveness—which grew more and more demonstrative as more and more scandalous details came to light—I found myself trapped between a past that I could not escape and a future that, despite my best efforts, I never managed to reach. Above all, I now felt that I had definitively become a part of the very past from which we so desperately wanted to escape—from now on, I would have to carry it with me without even knowing what it was or where it lay. If, for a short moment, the Munich Olympics had allowed me to feel

comfortable where I had been born, my experience with this self-righteous academic made me want *not* to fit in there.

It is no wonder, then, that alternative ways of relating to the past (which my advisor had disqualified as "un-historical," or, wearing a Marxist hat, as "non-dialectical") began to fascinate me. Above all, I fell in love with the epically heavy images and the paradoxical sadness of postwar America captured in the first installment of Francis Coppola's *Godfather* trilogy (which I saw for the first time in 1973). The realization that a family's past is its destiny has not lost its fascination for me, even today. I also sensed an affinity with the frozen mythological time awaiting impossible redemption that Gabriel García Márquez conjured up in his masterful novel, *A Hundred Years of Solitude*. (After some weak approval at the beginning, my advisor had concluded that this book in particular was "trivial.") Now part of a very different intellectual atmosphere, I was growing familiar with Niklas Luhmann's idiosyncratic—and therefore interesting—understanding of time as something defined by "complexities whose reduction through social systems has not yet happened." I began to prefer these approaches to the increasingly empty-seeming promises attached to the "Process of Modernity," which my academic generation of humanists was expected to embrace as the one-and-only frame of reference for teaching and writing. Indeed, any alternative was welcome that allowed me to forget my inability to leave the past behind.

In the summer of 1977—it was summer in the Northern hemisphere, at any rate—my first visiting professorship brought me back to Brazil. I still felt, for reasons of political correctness, hesitant about spending time in a country under military dictatorship. Much worse was the welcome banner —displayed at the entrance gate to the beautiful, very tropical campus of the Pontificia Universidade Catolica in Rio de Janeiro—that hailed me as my advisor's "former student." Despite this inauspicious beginning, however, it was a pleasure to teach "German Phenomenology" for four hours at a time, five days per week, to some twenty-five outstanding colleagues and graduate students; the experience (to say nothing of the charm of nearby beaches like Leblon and Ipanema) was so enjoyable that, for an entire month—that is, for the full duration of my stay—I forgot about the past. The musical spring of Brazil belonged to Milton Nascimento, an Afro-Brazilan singer whose enchantingly soft and sensual voice (which had a touch of "pop" free from guilt) filled my mind, my ears, and my body

with the rich naiveté of Brazilian folklore and, once more, Roman Catholic song. Everything that I experienced connected with my memories of Spain and intensified my desire for a world that, instead of being a future to which I had to commit, would simply be non-German and gentle—if need be, "gentle" in spite of its political institutions. I returned to Europe just in time for what history books today describe as "the German Autumn."

The Red Army Faction (*RAF*, *Rote Armee Fraktion*, with an "r," in German) was a group of German radicals who, in the decade that followed the protest movements of 1968, had isolated themselves even from left-wing organizations willing to participate in mainstream politics. Their strategies proceeded from a diagnosis of the present as a situation of civil war. Their actions, which were based on unconditional violence (including a readiness to sacrifice their own lives), demonstrated a high degree of logistical sophistication, and the group had established relationships with terrorist circles in the Middle East. (The extent of these relationships has never been fully determined, but they were clearly intense.) In the summer and autumn of 1977, the *RAF* carried out a series of kidnappings and hijackings meant to liberate members of the group already detained in German prisons (above all, in Stammheim, near Stuttgart). In fact, the German Autumn began in the summer, on July 30, with an attempt to kidnap Jürgen Ponto, the director of the Dresdner Bank; although the operation failed, Ponto died. On September 5, after killing three police officers and a driver, the *RAF* abducted Hanns-Martin Schleyer, the president of the German Employers' Association. There followed several weeks of negotiations about exchanging Schleyer for *RAF* prisoners. When three of the latter were found dead in their cells on October 18, the *RAF* commando executed Schleyer, leaving his corpse in the trunk of a car in the French city of Mulhouse. While Schleyer was still alive—on October 13—four members of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine had hijacked a Lufthansa aircraft en route from Palma de Mallorca to Frankfurt with eighty-six passengers and five crew members on board; after an odyssey through different Mediterranean and Middle Eastern airports, the plane landed in Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia. After several days of negotiations—again with the goal of securing the release of the Stammheim prisoners—a German anti-terrorism unit stormed the aircraft. Three of the four hijackers were killed; all the passengers and surviving crewmembers (the terrorists had executed the captain of the aircraft) were liberated. The

event evidently led to the three deaths at Stammheim (which were probably suicides) and to the execution of Hanns-Martin Schleyer.

Several parts of the past that I had inherited combined to make the weeks of the German Autumn a present-day nightmare: the unredeemed "revolutionary" dreams of 1968, which had turned into a complex, war-like sequence of crimes: the unwillingness on the part of Palestinians to accept the legitimacy of Israel when seeking to resolve political issues; the Holocaust as the inescapable horizon of history and time in Germany; and the murder of Jewish athletes in 1972, which had darkened and destroyed the aura of the Munich Olympics as "serene games" that would inaugurate a new German present. In reaction to the renewed experience of the impossibility of leaving the past behind, the German government finally attempted to make a definitive break. It was formally decided never to engage in negotiation with terrorist groups again. Without a doubt, this response helped, in following years, to close the book on the German Autumn by isolating its consequences from the present.

Consequently, it felt like the energy of protest and rage that still haunted my generation was "drying up." Rainer Werner Fassbinder's marvelous film, *The Marriage of Maria Braun* (1979)—which, like this book (but in a much more powerful way), tries to evoke the *Stimmung* of the postwar years—concludes with a montage inspired by my generation's stubborn dysphoria. Voices and photographs of contemporary German politicians (Helmut Schmidt, Konrad Adenauer, and others) morph into iconic photographs and voices of important Nazis, thereby suggesting unbroken "historical" and national continuity. I would not have dared say, at the time, that the gesture failed to convince me. The truth is, I had deliberately avoided making up my mind. I felt my basic political assumptions fade away in the years that followed. But the horror that we all felt has marked political relations between Germany, the Islamic countries of the Middle East, and Israel up to the present day—perhaps even among those who are too young to have any concrete memories of the tension and despair that made the German Autumn of 1977 so disastrous. At the time, my personal feeling of contamination by the German past was doubled by the certainty that German society (and the German State) would never overcome its specific historical burden. This was probably an overreaction—Germany is doing quite well today and has managed to avoid confronting what

happened in the late 1970s. And yet, a mere quarter of a century later, it would become clear to me that the energy of the past was still alive.

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Only few months after the German Autumn, in the early-morning hours of May 24, 1978, Marco, the first of my four children, was born in a hospital at Bochum-Langendreer. Becoming parents had given his mother and me the hope that we might finally shape our own present—a present different from the legacies of our families in Spain and in Germany, to whom we had remained attached all too closely. I do not remember any other event that changed the temporal horizon of my existence as abruptly and irreversibly as the arrival of my eldest son. After enduring the endless minutes when a young father fears for the lives of the baby and mother, and after cautiously holding my son in my arms for the first time, I went back to the apartment, exhausted. When I woke up hours later, I knew right away that something in my existence had changed forever. At first, I did not know what it was. I smoked an early-morning cigarette—the one that makes the brain so active—and I noticed, all of a sudden, that the years after 2000 had begun to matter to me. Until then, I had associated this future with what I imagined would be old age—and, also, with worrisome but remote predictions about threats facing mankind as a whole. Until May 24, 1978, the time that would follow the year 2000 had been a future without relevance—a future like a gray cloud—a future that my daily concerns and actions needed never touch upon. Now, for the father of a child who would reach adulthood by the turn of the millennium, it had become a future that mattered—for which, without any specific goals or plans as yet, I felt responsible. It was an empty future—no longer a future filled by an unshaped cloud, but an empty future to be shaped. My memories of that morning are still clear and certain today; they have no hint of latency. The past remained as heavy as it had always been, but now it was no longer my exclusive and overwhelming concern. I do not believe I have made many good decisions about my children’s future. All the same, since May 24, 1978, nothing has been more important to me than the hope that their future will allow them to feel different about the past that I inherited—which they, now, have inherited from me.

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Before Marco was two years old, I received an invitation to teach for three months as a Visiting Professor for the French Department at the University of California in Berkeley. Initially, I grappled with the question whether I was betraying my (no-longer-certain) commitment to adolescent Leftism by spending time and teaching in the United States. It was like the faint sound of an echo—a "compulsory" echo—of 1968. Finally, the desire to accept (that is to say: a combination of academic ambition and curiosity) prevailed. In part, the desire was grounded in childhood memories of friendly soldiers (most of them black), who were the fathers of some of my schoolmates and had always treated us like family when they drove up in their Jeeps during recess. So I went to California with Marco and my wife—and not much bad faith, for I was ready to admit to myself that this was the right decision, at least for me. From the first, I was struck by the luminous daylight of the Pacific coast. Almost immediately, I sensed I had found a place that felt like my "own." Perhaps this was the case because I had chosen to go there against what I still held to be my "deepest convictions"—and, also, because my work at Berkeley gave me more pleasure than ever before. It was at Berkeley, too, that I gained familiarity with an intellectual sensibility whose name seemed both threatening and promising. "Deconstruction" left no American humanist unaffected in those years. One had either to embrace or reject it; no professional existence in the academic humanities was left untouched. In this sense, when I first realized that Deconstruction refused to transform the past into "History," I was duly scandalized; secretly, however, I was perhaps relieved.

In the spring of 1980, the shock of brighter sunlight and a very different work environment began to change me more than I was willing to admit. When I had the honor of being invited to Berkeley again for the first months of 1982, I went alone because my wife was pregnant with our daughter Sara; also, she wanted to spend time in Salamanca with her family and our son. In the meanwhile, our relationship had only become more complicated—which made the dream of a California future all the more attractive to me. When I was asked to give a job talk for a position in Comparative Literature, I spoke (with ironic undertones) about "The Ever Rising Bourgeoisie in Marxist Histories of Literature." I can still remember how wounded I felt by the first question in the ensuing discussion—which came from a deconstructively minded colleague, of course: "We had all been hoping for some serious reading—and now you have bored us with a

foolish narrative instead." The words were just that aggressive. I cannot even remember what, exactly, I said in response. Miraculously, however, I ended up getting the job. But while I assured everyone there that I would absolutely come to California (which, as far as my desire and intentions were concerned, was absolutely true), I also knew all along that such a move would likely prove lethal to our already-fragile family life. So I decided to stay in Germany. It felt like I was writing off the possibility of a new, open future when I put the rejection letter—marked "Air Mail" and covered in stamps—into the mailbox.

Throwing away a future that I so desired overlapped with an offer, in Germany, to move to a smaller university that, because it needed young faculty to assure its own future, would provide exceptional working conditions. This was a typical situation in German academia at the time. Following the waves of success and expansion behind the "Economic Miracle" of the 1950s, many new institutions had been founded—more, it seemed, thanks to competition between the ten Federal States than as part of a master plan to promote higher education. The future of the new universities was as empty as my own—although the budgets at their disposal seemed to be overflowing. My modest contribution to the allocation of resources at the Universität Siegen (right in the middle of the old Federal Republic) involved organizing five large, generously funded colloquia at a so-called "Center for Interdisciplinary Research" in the beautiful Adriatic city of Dubrovnik between 1981 and 1989. The fact that Dubrovnik was in Yugoslavia—the only Socialist country with relatively liberal economic and educational politics—was key. Yugoslavia would allow Western scholars to organize an academic event with their own money and grant them complete intellectual freedom. At the same time, the other, more totalitarian Socialist countries had no cogent reason to deny their own academics the possibility of going to Yugoslavia. We firmly wanted these colleagues to participate, for Socialism and (to, a lesser extent, perhaps) Marxism still looked like the best way to shape the future for many of us.

Condescending and judgmental as it may sound, I will say today that this magnanimous plan for intellectual "inclusion" (to apply a present-day Californian concept to a past European reality) soon became secondary, for the simple reason that most of our colleagues from the Socialist world, despite our highest expectations and their best intentions, never had an

impact on the discussions. Leafing through the five massive volumes of our Dubrovnik proceedings (three of which I co-edited with my versatile and intellectually keen friend, Ludwig Pfeiffer), I am struck—and still quite proud—to see how many of the participants became important academic figures in the German *Geisteswissenschaften.* (Of course, there are many more names with which I can no longer associate any faces.) For me, at least, this decade-long project was fueled by the Oedipal urge to challenge the *Poetik und Hermeneutik*-group—a network of highly regarded scholars in the humanities grouped around some of my former Konstanz advisors (who, I felt, did not recognize my merits sufficiently). Thanks to the decision of the biggest German publisher to bring out our books in paperback editions, we were partly successful in our fight with the older generation. It was still the past that had brought us to Dubrovnik, but Ludwig and I became increasingly aware of our role as catalysts for a different academic style—the style of the first truly postwar generation of German academics. Each of our colloquia had an explicitly stated—often an overstated—topic, and all the topics converged in the intention to preserve the intellectual dynamics of the late 1960s (which already had a quasi-sacred aura) in shaping the future of the humanities. Between 1981 and 1985, we "revisited" certain segments of our discipline's past to discover new orientations or renew projects left unrealized: the first three colloquium topics were academic institutional history, approaches to the problem of historical periodization, and the concept of "style."

Then, in a slightly bolder move, we wanted to revisit "materialism" as the philosophical core of all Marxist theories. It was during the "materiality" debates that we sensed, for the first time, that some intellectual discontinuity was desirable. While few of the contributions and even fewer of the discussions really focused on the tradition of "materialism," a new vanishing point appeared that the cover of our fourth Dubrovnik volume described as "Materialities of Communication"—which we defined as "all those phenomena that contribute to the emergence of meaning without being themselves meaning-constituted." Based on this revised understanding of our project, the colloquium and its proceedings ultimately became one of the stages of an intellectual movement that has made "media studies" an obsession within the humanities at German universities to this very day. (A much more powerful and decisive influence

in the same direction came from the early works of Friedrich Kittler—who, incidentally, attended most of the Dubrovnik meetings.)

From that moment on, after the spring of 1987, we believed (or at least I did) that we had finally outlined the professional future of our generation. Today, I sometimes wonder if the title of our fifth and final symposium —"Paradoxes, Cognitive Dissonances, and Breakdown"—was not a symptom of Oedipal energy that had become self-destructive. The conviction that we had a program for the future—or that we had, at any rate, articulated our position—made it seem easier to achieve what, we still thought, was an obligation for each new generation, namely to cut ties to the immediate past and "leave behind" both what was obvious and what had remained latent. At some point during the period I tend to remember as my "Dubrovnik years" (and it may not be by chance that I have forgotten the precise date), I applied for the professorship of my former advisor, who had meanwhile retired, at the Universität Konstanz. I absolutely wanted this position, and I have no doubt that I would have accepted, had it ever been offered to me. But what I longed for even more was the sheer possibility of rejecting it. More precisely: what I wanted was the realistic freedom to imagine that I could reject an offer from Konstanz. Only this freedom never came. I tried to conquer the high citadel of "Literary Hermeneutics" with a lecture on *Das Nicht-Hermeneutische*—which gave the search committee an easy opportunity to teach me a lesson in power. The committee's final decision was certainly humiliating for me: I did not even make it into the final group of applicants "under consideration." And why, indeed, should the committee have considered me if I was trying to challenge everything that Konstanz was proud of? Within the changing framework of historical temporality in the 1980s, the experience helped me draw a double conclusion about personal time: Oedipal energy, I began to understand, had become an inadequate motivation for the almost forty-year-old professor that I now was; this also meant that, besides persuading myself that I had shaped my intellectual future, I needed to find an institutional setting for this future—one that would not be inherited but chosen; one that, as much as possible, stood open to be shaped by me. Meanwhile, the past remained untouched.

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Against the background of personal and professional struggles with the future, a debate suddenly began to attract attention and provoke us all; here, for the first time, doubts about the viability of the construction of time that we had inherited were made explicit. In 1979, Jean-François Lyotard published a small book, *La condition postmoderne*, which he had first written as an analysis of the present day and as a program for a potentially independent system of education in Québec. Lyotard's attention primarily falls on the master narratives of history (*grands récits*) that have dominated Western modes of assimilating the past since the early nineteenth century. However, by calling these discursive formations into question, Lyotard casts serious doubt on the promises of all conceptions of time that are grounded in concepts such as "modernity" and "progress"; the notion of the "postmodern," on the other hand, holds open epistemological space for alternate ways of assimilating the past. While Lyotard never made much headway in imagining or even describing such alternative possibilities, I was immediately drawn to his perspective—and to his elegant way of presenting his argument. (At the same time, I held distant from corresponding, "postmodern" stylistic gestures, which present historically different traditions as simultaneous phenomena.)

Likewise, I never managed to relate as much as I believed I should to certain ecological concerns and motifs that counted as new and provocative around 1985—which, today, have become a matter of consensus for all political parties. I certainly believed the predictions (which were very popular in Germany at the time) that all the forests would be gone by the early twenty-first century, and I shared concern about the dangers posed by nuclear plants (which were soon confirmed by the disaster at Chernobyl, in 1986). Despite my readiness to believe, I could never get myself to integrate, into my everyday existence, any of the new habits that would be called "environmentally conscious" today. In their provocative novelty, however, ecological concerns and my reaction to them made me aware, for the first time, how I had long—but latently, so to speak—been very pessimistic about the future on which I nevertheless wanted to leave a mark. It seemed as if that future were slowly retreating.

Meanwhile, the past seemed to break away suddenly—as if by a merciful act of providence—in many ways and on as many levels. A good friend recently told me that—wholly by chance, of course—my life has witnessed many moments when personal thresholds and historical events coincided. If

he is right, this was never the case more than in 1989, when State Socialism began to implode, thereby bringing the Cold War to a surprisingly rapid conclusion. My second son (and third child), Christopher, had been born; I had divorced and remarried; and we had hardly left Germany to start a new life—with all the traditional expectations about "a new life in America"—at Stanford University in California, when the all-embracing change began. The very first newspaper I read in the United States after our arrival on Labor Day, 1989, reported on East German citizens who, on the way home from summer vacations in other Socialist countries, were seeking refuge in West German embassies (as they had a right to do, since West Germany's constitutional law included East Germans when defining citizens). This was the beginning of German reunification. Now, German reunification became the central—and probably the most dynamic—factor in the progressive dismantling and transformation of East European State Socialism. To my mind, it all happened just as necessarily (within a broad perspective) as, first, it had been unexpected.

My final months in Europe had included a lecture tour in Romania where, more than anywhere else in Eastern Europe, Socialism had deteriorated into a grotesque theater of official slogans and claims about "a national golden age" that no one even tried to reconcile with grim reality. My "five star" hotel in Bucharest, according to what I was told at the reception, only provided warm water between 3 and 5 A.M. Before I visited a few other university towns, the director of the German Cultural Institute openly and sarcastically introduced a fierce-looking man to me as "our driver who also is a *Securitate* agent." Intermittently, the director addressed long and defiant speeches to the walls of the building because he was convinced that they were filled with listening devices. In contrast, the days that my new wife and I spent in East Berlin in the summer of 1989, where we said farewell to friends, made us believe that Socialism had finally achieved a pleasantly uneventful—and only occasionally repressive—form of everyday equilibrium. Had anyone predicted what was about to become historical reality—had anyone told us that the East German State had but a few weeks left to live—we would have dismissed the speaker as absurdly biased and ideologically blind.

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Our American life, too, began with events we had never experienced before. In the late afternoon of October 17, 1989—one month and two weeks after our arrival—a major earthquake hit the San Francisco Bay Area. I still remember how, through the window of my new office, I saw two of the towers one typically finds on American campuses staggering as their bells rang, how the floor on which I stood shook in waves for seconds that seemed like an eternity. It was weeks before I trusted the ground I walked on. Ever since then, we have been living with the near-certainty that an earthquake of similar or greater magnitude will hit Northern California again in our lifetime. Despite this future—which, almost mathematically, draws closer every day—this part of the world attracts people from everywhere (for example, my family and me) who want to live here.

Less than a year and a half later, in early 1991, the United States led an international military coalition that liberated Kuwait after the country was invaded and occupied by Iraq. For the first time in my life, I lived in a country that was officially at war without encountering major signs of collective disapproval. The flags displayed on houses to show support for American soldiers impressed me, but as a German of the immediate postwar generation I also felt guilty about my reaction. On February 7, 1991—during the first Gulf War—Laura, my fourth and youngest child, came into the world. Since she was born in the United States and her mother and I did not claim German citizenship for her, she became the first American citizen in our family. This effect of bureaucracy—indeed, this "side-effect"—made me inordinately proud because it gave me the impression that the future I had been hoping for was now beginning to materialize.

During those early—and very happy—years in California, I was less concerned than ever before in my adult existence with anticipating the future or leaving the past behind. The three of my four children who lived with us were growing up as fast—and as slowly—as children grow. I began—quite slowly—to appreciate how the American university in general and the humanities in particular differed from Europe, and much more than I had expected. Each day at work turned into an enjoyable present. The way that that bright and enjoyable time progressively took form may have been one of the reasons why my first new project involved the attempt to make one year from the past as present in my own world as possible. It had to be a year chosen at random—one that no one had ever claimed was important.

My idea was not to “understand” the year in question—that is, to explain how it had emerged from its own past and therefore constituted a legacy and an agent of mediation for our present. Rather, my aim was to produce, by means of certain textual strategies and effects, a maximum impression of tangibility and immediacy. The year I ended up choosing was 1926. (Needless to say, numerous colleagues and readers wound up congratulating me for discovering the true and hitherto-unnoticed importance of 1926—which had never been my intention.) Two aspects of the book (which was finally published in 1997) proved significant for my understanding of how my relationship to the past had changed. My advisor in Konstanz had originally planned to write a literary history of the nineteenth century along “four synchronic cuts.” Although he never brought the project to an advanced level of realization, I knew that, under German institutional conditions, I would never have undertaken a project so close to an unfinished idea of his. Now, however, it was easily possible. It was also possible for me finally to read Heidegger, whose work I had simply avoided in my European years because of his involvement with Nazi ideology—and the Nazi Party. In California—with a new spatial, cultural, and political distance—I could allow Heidegger’s philosophy to grow on me and, indeed, become crucial over time. This was not even surprising. Two instances of the latent past had taken forms to which I could relate, even if my story with time was far from finished.

One day, as I was working on the final chapter of the 1926 book—mostly trying to describe the historical context for Heidegger’s *Sein und Zeit* (the manuscript for which had been written in its entirety that year)—Marco, who must have been sixteen at the time, asked me over dinner—bluntly and without warning—how I could spend so much time on a book by somebody who looked so much like Adolf Hitler. I really liked his question, for all its deliberate naiveté, because it suggested to me that my son stood as far away from German history as I had always wished to stand myself. For the same reason, I was surprised—and indeed dismayed—when, about a year later, Marco informed me that he had applied to become a military pilot in the German *Luftwaffe*. This was not exactly the kind of future I had imagined the morning after he was born. In lengthy discussions that were often more painful and aggressive than either of us had ever anticipated, I began to realize—and not just in theoretical terms—that my past and future, as well as all the values, fears, and taboos that depended on them, had been

incontrovertibly shaped by my date and place of birth. This also meant that there was neither a need—nor even a possibility—to make them "match" with the times of my children's lives. For them, I had to let go of what I was unable to let go for myself. Even now, I will admit, it is not easy for me to accept this generational change—the way the postwar years have imposed themselves on my life time and again. This is all the more the case because, each time that a feeling of transition has returned, it has involved the impression that time is congested—that a certain fatality has not yet produced form and clarity. A new time—Marco's time—was beginning to leave me behind, although I was not able to abandon my own past.

In late summer, 1996, Marco went to Germany—not "back to Germany," I would like to believe, but to a Germany different from the one I had known—which became the future and the present that he chose for himself, which he has continued to choose ever since. Our starting situations were not symmetrical, but I hope they were just—even though I felt that time was being derailed, that it was headed for a present and a future that I had never wanted. This time of apparent derailment was also when the best period of my professional existence began—even as I was experiencing that present, I already anticipated looking back with nostalgia. The Stanford Board of Trustees had appointed a new University President. Gerhard Casper was a law professor of German origin who had spent most of his academic career in the United States; Hannah Arendt, during her years at the University of Chicago, had been a decisive intellectual influence on him. Everyone on campus was surprised when Casper made Condoleezza Rice, a young African-American professor of political science, University Provost. (Later, she became National Security Advisor and Secretary of State.) Casper worked with her for seven of his eight years at the helm. I felt immediately drawn to Casper's and Rice's vision of the potential that academic life holds. For as long as they held their positions, I had the impression that their vision of Stanford was the university I wanted. Perhaps this is the reason I found it so appealing when they asked, informally and over dinner, that I organize a series of twenty lectures and four colloquia under the name "Stanford Presidential Lectures on the Future of the Humanities and Arts in Higher Education." The series was to have a practically unlimited budget, and almost unrestricted intellectual freedom was guaranteed. The ambitious goal that had been set was to make the humanities and the arts more central to the life of a university whose

national and international reputation, until then, had been based almost entirely on science, engineering, and the Business and the Law School.

The task I had been given clearly resembled the self-assigned agenda of our Dubrovnik colloquia from a good ten years earlier. This time, however, there was no past from which to take distance, no energy of change to be maintained, no future to be conquered. Rather, each lecture and each colloquium provided the opportunity to celebrate the humanities and the arts in the present. It was not a matter of explicitly praising tradition but, in some cases at least, of witnessing intellectual brilliance in action—or, alternately, a stunning performance. The evening when Pina Bausch staged *Sacre du printemps* with a young Brazilian ballet dancer in front of a speechless audience was one of the very few moments of my life when—encountering such beauty (and, also, experiencing such a sense of pride and accomplishment)—I wanted time to stand still. The lecture by Jacques Derrida, who had never been to Stanford before, was memorable in a different way. As always in those years, Derrida spoke for more than two hours. What he said was as impenetrable to parties uninitiated into his philosophical position as most of his writings. However, he spoke of a "University that May Come from the Future." There was much debate about the possible Jewish or Messianic inspiration of this vision. Decisive was Derrida's new—and largely implicit—perspective on time: the future no longer appeared as a dimension to be conquered but as a movement—a hope coming true, a vision, a threat—that was approaching us. Even independently of Derrida's work, the title of his lecture was a symptom of a profoundly changed relationship with time.

Most of the scholars we invited had made a name for themselves during the intense theory debates that dominated the humanities and arts for a short half-century, from the early 1950s to the final decade of the millennium. It became clear, however—both in the context of the Presidential program and elsewhere—that desire for theory, which had only grown in preceding decades, was now receding; this helped us discover a surprising chronological parallel—which is hard to explain—between the Cold War and the great age of "Theory" in the humanities and arts. (Just like fears from the Cold War, "Theory" is still around and being taught—if only for want of subjects that seem timelier.)

During the period that I was in charge of organizing the "Presidential Lectures," I also received American citizenship. This was a time when it

was long clear to me that I would never be “completely American.” It was also clear—a matter that was more important, although less frustrating—that no one (except for me, perhaps) had ever expected this to occur. No one had put pressure on me to make it happen. What did *not* occur after I agreed to organize the “Stanford Presidential Lectures” was the promotion to a visible administrative role that I had anticipated. (I expected it without really trying to imagine what it would entail, apart from the opportunity to shape the humanities—at least at Stanford—and I didn’t even know if I really wanted this kind of appointment.) Not being offered such a position gave me more future—more time to dispose of—than ever before. Until then, most of the past had not appeared with sufficient clarity to be “rescued” from latency—it had not occurred in 1968, nor in 1989, nor at any other point in history. Times were changing profoundly—yet they were also changing less and less. I experienced a sensation of pleasant suspense, with less rush or pressure than ever before to discover what still lay hidden.

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Whenever I recall the times that have stayed with me from the long decade that has passed since the year 2000, it is difficult to see them as part of a chronological sequence. I do not know whether this is an effect of my own advancing age or the result of a transformation in the social construction of time. (When I told my students about this impression in a seminar, they surprised me by saying that it was entirely familiar to them.) Even the one day that has marked others so profoundly, the one day that seems to have produced a distinctive division between a “before” and an “after”—September 9, 2001—has cast gloomy, monochromatic light on the period that followed instead of appearing as a true turning point. When the suicidal and murderous destruction of the Twin Towers occurred in New York, it was early morning in California. For no reason in particular, my wife had woken up earlier than usual and was watching TV, and she immediately called me from my desk when the news broke about the two buildings that had been struck by hijacked airplanes. I believe the first tower was beginning to crumble just as the screen image came into focus for me, and we followed the next moments live (but I may be wrong about this). What I recall—graphically and as if in slow motion—is how there was enough time to hope that this would ultimately not happen. The seconds when the first

tower finally began to collapse, slowly and definitively, exercised a strong fascination—both the fascination that comes from forms in motion and the fascination that is held by something that cannot be true yet is actually happening. Perhaps no other day in history has produced a stronger or more immediate impression that the world "will never be the same again." That much was clear from the start. However—and this, while astonishing, is typical of a time of protracted latency—we are still debating today what makes the "post 9/11"-world different from the world before September 11, 2001. The years after 9/11 have shown that military action no longer involves a display of strategically prepared moves between opponents who, in principle, are of comparable strength. Most military actions have become asymmetrical on multiple levels; this, above all, explains why it is no longer possible to win wars definitively. But I believe that September 11, 2001, "condensed" a much more penetrating aspect of change. For one, it was it the first—and, so far, the only—time that U.S. territory has been violated by an enemy power. But what also made the attack unique were many motives and forms of resentment from the past that converged here. It was as if the terrorists of the German Autumn in 1977 had returned and appeared in the earliest twenty-first century with a more determined, more daring, and more lethal madness than ever before. Behind them—congested and explosively condensed—stood multiple historical waves of anti-Semitism (like the killing of Israeli athletes in 1972 or even the Holocaust) and, as its consequence and reverse, anti-Americanism of the most contemptuous sort. Ages of frustration and hatred had come together powerfully enough to scar forever a continent that, for too long, had believed it would be protected by the distance between itself and the Old World (and the Old World's inheritance). Ever since September 11, 2001, we are aware that globalization also means that no place on the planet is safe from the murderous, all-destructive energy that lies sedimented in humanity's past. Europe, South America, Africa, and Asia are no safer than the United States. This is why the world will indeed never be the same again—and why, like a tone or a color, the events of September 11 have overshadowed every day, every hour, and every minute that followed.

That same decade, in September 2005, one month after his eighty-fifth birthday, my father died. Towards the end, our relationship had been pleasant yet distant, and so I reacted to his death—the first time a close relation had passed away—with quiet sadness. When he retired, twenty

years earlier, my father had been a popular local surgeon. He was also very much a man of his generation inasmuch as the war and the immediate postwar years were a constant point of reference for him. Since he enjoyed being provocative—and since he knew well how much he could hurt me with fond recollections of the Nazi past—I was certain, when he died, that there was no unpleasant detail from his life that I did not know about. Then I read, in the short obituary that appeared in the local newspaper, that my father had studied at the National Socialist "Military Medical Academy"—and not at the local university, as he had always told us. I will never find out the truth—nor do I really care about the facts. It could well be that my father hid his connection with the Military Academy from my sister and me—although it is also possible that he made up this segment of his life in an interview with a hometown journalist in order to look more impressive. Either way, even for me, nothing changes. Although my father had died, he had not taken with him the part of his life that has haunted mine. This was what I cared about: that he leave some clarity for his descendants (meaning, also, for me and what remains of my life).

When I saw his frozen corpse at the hospital where he died—with traces of agony on his face—I placed my hand on his until the ice began to melt and I felt a distant closeness. Right before the funeral, I also tried to impress on my mind one final memory of his face by spending time next to the open casket. But the made-up face looked like a wax figure; it was not even recognizable as a variation of what my father's face had been in life. It did not resemble him—and it was only upsetting me. When I finally stood at his grave, with a shovel, and heard the dirt fall on the closed coffin, I did not feel the gratitude that I wanted to owe him—nor tenderness, peace, or bitter comfort. Instead, I wondered whether my father had been lying to us or to the journalist I would probably never meet. During the funeral, I tried to look as if I were absorbed in pious contemplation when I realized, once again, that I would never escape my father's past—which, when he died, entered into my full possession.

My father would have enjoyed meeting Marco's children, who were born in 2008 and 2010 (Clara, the older of the two, on the day that Barack Obama was elected President). I am sure Marco, who had a much more relaxed and loving relationship with him than I ever managed to have, would have liked to see this happen. For my part, I think it is good that my grandchildren are growing up with even more separation from the past than

my children had—a past that I have experienced as such a burden. In the event that Clara and Diego ever wish to know more about the relatives in their father's family who were still alive at the middle of the twentieth century, I wrote down all that I remember about them during a sabbatical year in Germany (which was the second year of Clara's life). Sometimes I feel that even my own presence—because of the scars and sprains that I have from my encounters with the past—is a mixed blessing for them, at best. Therefore, I tread lightly whenever I spend time with Clara and Diego: my own life would have been much better with less intense ties between the generations.

As I have spoken at length about the "distance" I experienced with regard to my parents' family and the history that it embodies for me, I should explain that I never sought this distance. Rather, it came about for different reasons in each instance. In my father's case, it resulted from an oscillation between sympathy and self-protection. In the case of my sister, she and I simply do not share many interests, friends, or concerns. As for my mother (as I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter), an unbridgeable distance exists between us because she suffers from active memory loss and can therefore no longer distinguish between her late husband, her grandson, and me. The situation is so firmly established that I recently went, for an academic occasion, to the town where my mother and sister are still living, and did not tell them. I view this state of affairs as the best possible ending to a story that is, of course, also never-ending (our lives could easily become entwined again at some point in the future). For now, I worry about the future of my grandchildren, above all. But if I do so, it is for reasons largely unrelated to the past they have inherited from me, through their father.

. . .

Being able to go back—almost without lending the matter a second thought—to the town where I was born and spent the first nineteen years of my life is a good ending to my "story" with time—because it contains no drama and is positively banal. But, as I said, there is my grandchildren's future to worry about, independent of my own past; the profession I exercise also encourages me to think about how time is shaped. Clara and Diego will potentially enjoy long lives. (At birth, each of them received a document

that officially declared an average life expectancy of well over a hundred years.) I think their lives will unfold in a future that belongs to a construction of time different from the one into which I was born. In this new chronotope, the future will no longer be experienced as an open horizon of possibilities from which one can choose, but as a multiplicity of approaching threats. Instead of a series of choices to make, my grandchildren's lives will be a sequence of chalIenges to survive. I will not discuss the merits and uncertainties of prognostications like "global warming" or "the depletion of natural resources"; it is enough to remark just how much they impress us, how they seem to be unavoidable, and how even the most strenuous ecological efforts seem to slow their arrival only insignificantly. On the other hand, Clara and Diego will no longer be able to leave, definitively, any past behind, and thus the past will invade their present—as it has already begun to do now, in the form of multiple and endlessly returning waves of nostalgia. The unprecedented storage capacity of electronic media compounds this effect constantly. Between that other future and this different past, my grandchildren's present will not be an "imperceptibly short moment of transition" (as Charles Baudelaire described the present of the chronotope he inhabited), but an ever-broadening array of simultaneities. When nothing can be left behind, each recent past is imposed, in the present, on previously existing and stored pasts, and in this ever-broadening present of the new chronotope there will be a diminished sense of what each "now"—each present—really "is." (Already today, I am sure, fewer women know what colors are in fashion than, say, twenty years ago.)

The ever-broadening present has begun to give us the impression that we are stuck in a moment of stagnation. Time ceases to be considered an absolute agent of change. At the same time, within the broadening present, certain activities and behaviors—certainly all forms of behavior facilitated by electronic technology—will accelerate and consume more and more of the time that we have at our disposal, without producing any sense of direction or achievement. If the "old present"—the present of transition and change—was the epistemological habitat of the Cartesian Subject (meaning a conception of the subject that equates its own ontology with human consciousness), then the new, "broad present" of simultaneities will inform a different kind of self-reference. Here may lie the reason for all the efforts made in the humanities and the arts over the past few decades to return to

“the body” as our dominant self-image; these academic efforts may provide an overture for a will, in the coming generations, to lead (“to return to”) a more sensual life. Of course, our new incapacity to leave any past behind also applies to the legacy of the previous chronotope. Since we are incapable of leaving anything from the past behind, my grandchildren may continue to use—to recycle—concepts from the old chronotope, even if doing so no longer corresponds to their everyday behavior within the changed dimensions of past, future, and present.

Over the past decade, I have had many academic opportunities to explain and refine my intuition about the emergence of a new chronotope. It would therefore be quite underwhelming if I finished this book by merely repeating previous statements and affirming that “my story with time” has culminated in the new chronotope of the broad present. The point to be made concerns the postwar years as a period of latency—more specifically, how those years of latency relate to the new chronotope. It seems a plausible hypothesis that the postwar period of latency was a first wrinkle in the smooth running of “historical time,” that is, a first wrinkle in “historical time” as a chronotope whose three key conditions—leaving the past behind, going through a present of mere transition, and entering the future as a horizon of possibilities—previous generations took for granted to such an extent that they confused this specific topology with “time itself” or “History” *per se*. Because the previous generation took these conditions to be metahistorical, transcultural, and therefore inevitable, there was no way to think that something about “time” had begun to change when our parents’ everyday actions—and, later on, our own—no longer converged with the historicist chronotope and its familiar effects. Being unable to leave the past of our fathers behind, we believed back in 1968, must be the result of silence and repression, of leaving certain facts and deeds unsaid—a form of (in)action that acquires an enormous dimension of latency, that is, the presence of the past that was and is, at the same time, troubling and inaccessible.

In a retrospective glance from the early twenty-first century, we are now able to see the mood of the years after 1945 as a first wrinkle within the linear temporality of the chronotope that was called “History” (which was considered to stand outside of time itself)—a wrinkle within the linear temporality of a former chronotope, which today has been succeeded by a different construction of time that has been evident, with clearer symptoms,

since the late 1970s (when we were all engaged in that battle between the champions of "Postmodernity" and the defenders of "Modernity"). If we dare to think through such a historicization of "History," then it is possible to speculate that, perhaps, *there was nothing at all that the years after 1945 had actually left latent*. In other words: "latency" and all the agonies of "No Exit/No Entry," "Bad Faith/Interrogation," and "Derailment/Containers" may well have been effects produced by the incipient transformation of the chronotope that then prevailed. My story with time—my generation's story with time—would have been precisely this process of living through a protracted metamorphosis of the historicizing chronotope. Of course, there is no "empirical" way to prove this thesis right or wrong. To speak again in more personal terms, it explains why no philosopher I had the fortune to interact with challenged or impressed me more than Jean-François Lyotard. As a "symptomatologist of the present" (as he liked to describe himself), he was the first who dared claim that historical time had come to an end.

One question remains about the reasons for such a chronotopical change—but whenever I ask myself this question, the answers that occur to me tend to be so abstract and general as to appear arbitrary and banal. I think of explanations such as "the increased outer or inner complexity of our world" or "the shock caused by the destructive powers of the Second World War"—and then I quit, quite unimpressed by my own solutions; I am convinced that I would be happy if I were simply able to describe the mid-twentieth-century feeling of latency as a first congestion within historical time—a congestion that proved to be an early symptom of the new chronotope's emergence.

. . .

I started to write this final chapter during (yet another) short visiting professorship in Budapest. Those two-odd weeks in the Hungarian capital were accompanied by the impression (which is, of course, the impression of a writer who is obsessed with his book) that no other city displays more clearly and "for all time" the tragic traces of the moment when historical temporality began to collapse. For when Soviet tanks rolled into Budapest in the fall of 1956, they closed, violently, the open future that was supposed to be both a condition and a promise of Socialism. From that moment on—which, as I see it, truly inaugurated the "Cold War"—it became clear that

Socialism no longer held forth an open future to choose and to shape, but a future that was pre-defined and steered by an increasingly geriatric regime and its orthodoxy. I do not mean to say, however, that the Soviet Union singlehandedly destroyed Socialism and, with it, the chronotope of History. Rather, I believe that the Soviet generals and Party secretaries who gave the fatal order to invade Hungary started the first phase of the chronotope shift. Only later, in the two decades that preceded the collapse of State Socialism —when Soviet citizens began to describe their present as a "time of stagnation"—was it clear how closely related Socialism—as a possibility, and a most generous promise, at that—had been to the time and chronotope of "History."

There are sites in the cityscape of Budapest—above all, the square in front of the Parliament building where houses still exhibit the traces of Soviet bullets—that stand as monuments to a dream that has been ground into rubble. I could not help associating the heaviness of the atmosphere on those warm Indian summer days with a sadness that came over me, which seemed always to have been there. Then, my companion handed me the English translation (by Ted Hughes) of a text in which the great Hungarian poet János Pilinszky condensed and preserved the time leading up to October and November 1956. Pilinszky worked on this text during the worst years of Hungarian Stalinism, between 1950 and 1955, when its publication was forbidden. It finally came out in July 1956, three months before the national catastrophe. The title is *Apocrypha*. The poem starts with a line that soon proved prophetic. It declares that one day in the future, the future (of this future) will be lost and no longer stand open: "Everything will be forsaken then." The stanza following this verse is full of emblems of the future that used to inspire hope but now appears worn out and "dumb":

> The silence of the heavens will be set apart
> And forever apart
> The broken-down fields of the finished world.
> and apart
> the silence of dog-kennels.
> In the air a fleeing host of birds
> And we shall see the rising sun
> Dumb as a demented eye-pupil
> And calm as a watching beast
>
> —trans. Ted Hughes and János Csokits in: Peter Dávidházi et al., eds., *The Lost Rider: A Bilingual Anthology* (Budapest, 1999), pp. 412–17

The first time I read *Apocrypha*, I was immediately struck by a sentence that seemed to contain an epiphany, so bright was the light it shed on the postwar time that I have been trying to make present again and think through in this book: “Do you understand the wrinkle/of transience?” Transience, I had believed until then, does not have a wrinkle. It is a transition so smooth and easy that it does not leave room—or, more literally, “time”—for anything but itself, that is, (further) transience. Transience with a wrinkle, I now understood, was a specific present—the present of the chronotope of progress when it begins to slow down and generate pain: “Do you comprehend/my care-gnarled hands? Do you know/the name of the orphanage? Do you know//what pain treads the unlifting darkness/with cleft hooves, with webbed feet?” With the future mute and the present a wrinkle, the past freezes, petrifies, becomes heavy, and refuses to stay “behind,” where it “belongs.” The dimension of futurity is occupied by the frozen future of the past; thereby, all that remained unfulfilled comes to the fore, retrospectively and aggressively:

> Evening will come, and night will petrify
> Above me with its mud. Beneath closed eyelids
> I do not cease to guard this procession
> these fevered shrubs, their tiny twigs.
> Leaf by leaf, the glowing little wood.
> Once Paradise stood here.
> In half-sleep, the renewal of pain:
> To hear its gigantic trees.

Between muteness, wrinkling, and petrification, time ceases to move forward, and stagnation replaces progress and acceleration. What had been movement and hope is now ground to bits:

> God sees that I stand in the sun.
> He sees my shadow on stone and on fence.
> He sees my shadow standing
> without a breath in the airless press.
>
> By then I am already like the stone;
> a dead fold, a drawing of a thousand grooves,
> a good handful of rubble
> is by then the creature’s face.
>
> And instead of tears, the wrinkles on the faces
> Trickling, the empty ditch trickles down.

But this detailed and powerful poetic description of time contracting, from 1956, is only one dimension of *Apocrypha* that helped me understand what I was trying to describe in this book. In addition, the text links the

panorama of time coming to a halt to motifs that overlap—and are occasionally identical—with the motifs that I had identified and used to evoke the *Stimmung* of the postwar years—that is, with the difficult desire to cross thresholds, with intransparency, and with open emptiness (the existential state that, I believe, underlay the obsession of being contained and protected). The poem contains a stanza about the return to the house of one's parents that reminds me of Private Beckmann's attempt to find his family's home in Wolfgang Borchert's *Draussen vor der Tür*:

> Home—I wanted finally to get home—
> To arrive as he in the Bible arrived.
> My ghastly shadow in the courtyard.
> Crushed silence, aged parents in the house.
> And already they are coming, they are calling me,
> my poor ones, and already crying,
> and embracing me, stumbling—
> the ancient order opens to readmit me.

What follows is a lament about the impossibility of making onseself understood, by means of language or otherwise. While it remains open whether the "you" in this passage refers to the parents or not, it is inconceivable that being "readmitted into the ancient order" could be a matter of simple and restorative reintegration. For both the "words" and the "voice" are "homeless":

> If only for this once I could speak with you
> whom I loved so much. Year after year
> yet I never tired of saying over
> what a small child sobs
> into the gap between the palings.
> The almost choking hope
> that I come back and find you.
> Your nearness throbs in my throat.
> I am agitated as a wild beast.
> I do not speak your words.
> the human speech. There are birds alive
> who feel now heart-broken
> under the sky. Under the fiery sky.
> Forlorn poles stuck in a glowing field,
> and immovably burning cages.
> I do not speak your language.
> My voice is more homeless than the word!
> I have no words.

Coming home is difficult—painful with glimpses of joy—and words and the voice fail to capture its essence. Emptiness extends under the open sky;

“garden chairs” and “deck chairs” wait for bodies yet remain empty; solitude and coldness dwells within the protection in which those who lived in the postwar sought comfort:

> You are nowhere. How empty the world is.
> A garden chair, and a deck chair left outside.
> Among sharp stones, my clangorous shadow.
> I am tired. I jut out from the earth.

Today, sixty-five years after the publication of *Apocrypha*, we may have come to terms, more or less, with the transformed chronotope. Still, I find the images of difficult return, impossible communication, and existential emptiness that accompany the poetic description of congested time very painful. They have not only not left us—they seem so much closer to our perception of the world today that, recently, during the performance of a play by Samuel Beckett, it occurred to me that the scenes and characters no longer shocked me. Beckett’s universe has become our everyday world. This is why—like any true classic—Pilinszky’s poem speaks to us with immediacy. What he compressed into his poem is one half of our story with time.

. . .

Above my desk at home hangs a print, reproducing the dimensions of the original, of Jackson Pollock’s painting *Number 28* from 1950. Ever since, in the same week, a high school teacher and a local painter mentioned his name to me back in the mid-1960s, no visual artist has fascinated my eyes as much as Pollock. I say this without any hesitation or doubt—and I mean the word “fascination” in its literal sense: Jackson Pollock’s canvases irresistibly attract me, at a level higher or lower than anything I might be aware of—and so forcefully that I am unable to avert my gaze in their presence. *Number 28* is a large square in predominantly gray tones; streams of white cover green patches; and its many layers bear the black traces of paint that Pollock has dripped on the canvas. At points, these traces thicken into stains—stains that seem strangely frail, some of which resemble elongated islands. Everything I see seems to be moving, as if it will never stop. Whenever I let myself be dragged into the space of the painting, which is both flat and somehow more than just two-dimensional—as often occurs in hours of intense reading and writing in the very early morning—what I see is always too much, overwhelming or sublime. At the same time, what I

see promises form, rhythm, or some other kind of regularity that, ultimately, I never can grasp. My problem is the same as the one with which all critics of Pollock's work struggle, in spite of their strangely desperate efforts to devise psychoanalytic or other ingenious interpretations. Pollock's pictures do not translate into concepts or algorithms. However, I can also feel that *Number 28* engages me in an existential drama of the mid-twentieth century —the period that coincided with Pollock's short moment of mature productivity. I am torn between the impression that this canvas, despite the irresistible attraction it exercises, is rejecting me even though it also will not let me go. Sometimes, the painting seems to express an inner life I cannot decipher; at other points, it looks like the impenetrable surface of a mineral. It is like a vortex that pleasantly pulls me into a deep shelter, triggering thoughts and feelings that take me away from what I have been concentrating on.

After two decades of unsteady artistic experimentation, poverty, and alcoholic excess, Jackson Pollock found, in the mid- to late 1940s, a mode of painting with which he was comfortable—and which became successful almost immediately:

> My painting does not come from the easel. I hardly ever stretch my canvas before painting. I prefer to tack the unstretched canvas to the hard wall or the floor. I need the resistance of a hard surface. On the floor I am more at ease. I feel nearer, more a part of the painting, since this way I can walk around it, work from the four sides, and literally be *in* the painting (. . .).
>
> When I am in my painting I'm not aware of what I'm doing. It is only after a sort of "get acquainted" period that I see what I have been about. I have no fears about making changes, destroying the image, etc., because the painting has a life of its own. I try to let it come through. It is only when I lose contact with the painting that the result is a mess. Otherwise there is pure harmony, an easy give and take, and the painting comes out well. (Varnedoe/Karmel, 48)

The key word in this passage is printed in italics—it is a matter of being *in* the painting during the process of its emergence. Pollock may not have been the first artist to practice what we have come to call "action painting," but nobody drew more energy from it than he did. Being *in* the painting, I believe, does not involve only a spatial "inside"; Pollock's intuition also implies a transformation of time. For being "in the painting" means transforming multiple moments of transition (the present of the old chronotope) into a single, expanded time of creation in which the artist's agency is taken over by the "life of its own" that dwells within the painting. The expanded moment in which the present lingers and expands looks to me like another wrinkle in time—one that comes to us from the mid-

twentieth century. It is a present in which the most archaic aspects of painting coincide with the most energetic drive of the avant-garde.

But while the wrinkle of time in János Pilinszky's poem is a wrinkle of standstill, suffering, and death, the fold in Jackson Pollock's works, which involves the impersonal time of creation, is a wrinkle of ecstasy. This much certainly follows from the often highly intoxicated and uninhibited state in which he would spread paint over his canvas, but it also connects with the impact that his paintings have on many of the people who open themselves to the works' overwhelming power. Moreover, the concept of ecstasy captures a specific condition that also belongs to the historical context in which Pollock lived and worked. It is obvious how both Socialism (which existed chiefly as a utopian ideology) and Capitalism (which still exists as action and movement at an ever-accelerating pace) depended on the old chronotope of progress, transition, and taking distance from the past. In the knotty connections between Pilinszky's poem *Apocrypha* and the events of the Hungarian Revolution it becomes visible how, under Socialist conditions, this chronotope showed the first signs of collapse when its open future became congested and began, finally, to close down. Could it be, now, that the corresponding risk (indeed, the fate) of collapse will arrive on the Capitalist side—and perhaps some day soon—as the result of its unlimited, ecstatic acceleration into an ever more open future? Could the financial crisis in which we are living, the crisis that nobody knows how to fix—except by borrowing more money from the future (and thereby making it worse)—could this crisis of overheated acceleration be the self-destructive Capitalist equivalent of the Socialist stagnation that began in the 1980s?

Jackson Pollock's life has been described as "a drama in three acts." This scheme of representation resembles a compressed version of a possible history of Capitalism: "1930–47, he searches for himself; 1947–50, he finds himself; 1950–56, he loses himself" (62). Capitalism, in contrast, took centuries to emerge, but it enjoyed a short moment when it maximized its positive effects—roughly between 1970 and 2001. Now, as a result of this accelerating self-maximization, it may have lost its touch with reality, i.e., with the necessary conditions for its survival. Pollock's *Number 28*, like a large number of his most famous canvases, was produced during the summer of 1950 for a show that would open in November in New York. At that point, Pollock had been sober for two years. It must have been one of

the few times when the ecstasy of his creative process did not rely on self-destruction. That fall, a camera team came to Pollock's studio on Long Island to shoot photographs and footage of his action painting. For technical reasons, most of the scenes that were actually filmed were only simulations, which turned out to be excruciating for Pollock. In the end—and just before the opening of the show—the artist succumbed once more to his drinking habits. He entered a downward spiral from which he never recovered, which ultimately made it impossible for him to paint. The end came on August 11, 1956, three and a half months before the Hungarian Revolution. Heavily drunk (and not far from his studio), Pollock joined the other titans of his age who had died in car accidents. There is something disturbingly familiar in his art for me—and I have similar feelings about Pilinszky's poem (even though this impression is still fresh, whereas Pollock's painting has produced its effects on me for almost my entire life). Both the poem and the painting make visible the transformation of time that was underway when they were first produced; both the poem and the painting make present to me—and engage me in—the existential dramas of the 1950s. Therefore, both incite us to think about a self-destructive potential within Socialism in the past, which may yet undo Capitalism in the future.

When this chapter was already finished, my friend Martin Seel mailed me a reaction to what I had written, in which he related Pollock's painting to the existential challenges of our present. As I found his remarks to be quite surprising—rather different from my own views but not incompatible with them—I have decided to translate and quote Seel here (without reproducing his words exactly, as my translation may contain a heavy dose of interpretation). What this chapter says about Pollock, he writes, suggests that the alternative between progress and standstill has now collapsed. The belief in a common path towards the future is gone, utopian dreams have faded; but—in spite of September 11, 2001, and despite the financial crisis—the vision of having no exit has vanished, too. It may be time, then, for us to rethink, from a different perspective, what the "opening of time" might be. In all likelihood, this opening is no longer a direction and does not offer the contrast of being either glorious or apocalyptic; instead, it is an opaque tissue of things and events and, at the same time, a fabulous rhythm of possibilities and impossibilities within which we (and generations to follow) must orient ourselves. This may sound more melancholy than it really is—for it is only melancholy in relation to the dream of the

philosophy of history, which seeks an overarching principle of clarity and structure. Pollock makes us think, Seel concludes, that now is the time for a sharpened sense of, and increased attention to, the present—a focus on each successive *hic et nunc*, no longer drifting towards either past or future.

Most times when I contemplate the Pollock reproduction at my home in California, here and now, the painting, as I have said, seems threatening, like a vortex with sublime power. However, the threat also promises absorption into a telluric comfort that I have never found elsewhere in my life. Only now have I understood that this is where my story with time ends, my story with time as it originated around 1950. The story ends with me feeling simultaneously attracted to, and rejected by, the reproduction of Pollock's painting hanging over my desk at home. Or, to be more precise, it ends in my carrel, on the third floor of Stanford's Green Library, on Monday, October 24, 2011, at 5.26 p.m, as I sit describing how impressed I was by the picture this morning. I can finally understand why Pollock has always fascinated me. His work takes me back to the point where this book begins—to the years around 1950. I believe I now understand my fascination with his paintings better. What appeared in a state of latency, then, stands at the origin of the different order of time in which we are living, now.

THE FORM OF THIS BOOK

The form of this book is more regular and symmetrical—divided as it is into seven chapters—than any other work I have written. I had no reason at all to expect such clear definition when I started to think about writing it six or seven years ago. In fact, the book did not begin with a thought, an idea, or an intuition, nor was there even anything like a "project." Rather, I felt an irresistible urge to look at pictures and read texts from the middle of the twentieth century, when I was born. On the last day of writing, which happens to be the last day of the first week of 2012, I can see how that original impulse pushed (and dragged) me to a point from which I can begin to understand why writing this text became a matter of incomparable urgency to me. Between my initial desire to be absorbed by a specific moment of the past, on the one hand, and the retrospective position I occupy today, on the other, the book now stands completed, its orderly structure belying the passion invested. As I had no direction in mind when I began—and certainly nothing like a goal—I found myself discussing my initial impulse more and more frequently, and with more and more friends and colleagues (both in person and electronically), than is otherwise my habit. (And I have *always* thought—with considerable embarrassment at my lack of academic decorum—that I speak about my intellectual interests far too promiscuously.) Right from the start, this openness (which was also helplessness on my part) provoked many reactions—and often strong ones. I associate such intensity with the neat structure the book has now assumed—and also with the impression, evident in the final chapter, that it possesses a single, coherent argument.

I hope these sentences do not sound as shallow as the standard, obligatory rhetoric of the academy. I am *not* trying to say that my book "owes much to dialogue with, and healthy criticism from, esteemed colleagues." It would be more precise to employ a rather mechanical metaphor: by encountering resistance—and sometimes negative feedback, pure and simple—in texts, mails, lectures, and seminars, an urge that was initially vague acquired focus and form. In other words, I am indebted to many generous readers, listeners, speakers, and writers, and I owe them much more than just good ideas, additional information, and valuable

corrections. I am happy and thankful that the initial impulse, which was nothing but intensity, turned into a rhythm of work that yielded the form of a book. When I try to recall all the moments of insight and exchange, the task of expressing my gratitude seems endless (almost in the literal sense of the word). Once again, I face the problem of finding a shape—this time, not the contours of an argument, but a form in which I can express my gratitude in a way that corresponds to my feelings. Knowing only too well that no good solution ultimately exists, I have decided to make a distinction between conversations that happened in specific places, on the one hand, and electronic conversations, on the other. I would also like to make an implicit distinction between encouraging reactions and responses that warned me against the book that was taking shape. (Of course, this does not mean that I appreciate the former, even if they are more pleasant, more than the latter.) Let me begin with the *travelogue* of the project; its *electronic directory* then follows.

It all started in 2007, when, twice, I spent two weeks as a Leibniz Visiting Professor at the Simon Dubnow Institute for Jewish Culture and Jewish History in *Leipzig*. Here, the presence (sometimes silent) of Dan Diner made me grasp what I had to come to terms with. In Leipzig, reading Anselm Haverkamp made me discover how much the concept of "latency" intrigued me. From there, I went almost directly to *Lisbon* to teach a seminar on texts from the years after 1945 at the Faculdade de Letras, in a building constructed very much in a mid-twentieth-century style. I took it as a good sign (which, indeed, became a lucky constellation) that Miguel Tamen enjoyed listening to my reports on how his students coped with the topic—and that he asked me to send him a copy of the completed manuscript in order to make it available to the participants in his (graduate) Program in Literary Theory. The Carl-Friedrich-von-Siemens-Stiftung—my most lavishly generous sponsor—provided me with indispensable calm and time to read (and, occasionally, even to think) about the years when my life began for the nine months I spent ensconced between Amalienstrasse, the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, and the institute's building in *München-Nymphenburg*. The director, Heinrich Meier, showed his friendship by supporting a style of work and life of which, I know, he remains unconvinced. (From this time, too, I fondly remember conversations with Oliver Primavesi, Tatjana Michaelis, and Michael Krueger—conversations accompanied by the impeccable Italian food of Pasquale in the trattoria "Al

Torquio”—as well as intense exchanges with Ness on many taxi rides, mostly to the airport.) To employ the language of American commercials, the Pontíficia Universidade Católica in *Rio de Janeiro* and the Departamento de Historia of the Universidade Federal of *Ouro Preto* and *Mariana* provided two “homes” for my book; over three balmy Brazilian winters between 2009 and 2011, Valdei Araújo and Lua, Luiz Costa Lima, Ricardo Benzaquem, Marcelo Jasmin, Maisa Mader, Karl Erik Schoellhammer, and their students were patient, sharp, and inventive respondents to my sometimes rambling drafts. In a less exotic—but just as important—setting, my work has found a “home” on the campus of *Stanford* University, especially the anonymous carrel on the third floor of Green Library (where I type these words). For more than twenty-two years now, Margaret Tompkins has been the better half of what she once called our “two person international company with a California home base”; she is also the most scrupulous and enthusiastic reader I have ever known. In turn, the better half of my spiritual *oikos* is Robert Harrison, whose radiant intelligence prevented my book, early on, from turning into intellectual kitsch. For key works of the mid-twentieth century discussed here, Angela Becerra was a more clear-sighted and meticulous reader than I would ever have managed to be on my own; Noam Pines deserves similar credit for drawing up the list of secondary literature quoted in the book. Last—and most lastingly, too—Emily-Jane Cohen’s calm determination gave the book an editorial home away from home. Just when I thought almost everything was written and done, I arrived in *Budapest* during the Indian summer of 2011, where Kelemen Pál, Kerekes Amalia, Kallay Geza, and Contemplatia showed me the wounds on the face of their city, still visible from those times. Over coffee and cold drinks on the patio of ELTE, they helped me share that pain. Just for the record and before I forget, I should also mention the bad idea I had—in the company of Perla Chinchilla, Luis Vergara, and Ilán Semo from the Universidad Iberoamericana in *Mexico City*—to sing during a lecture, for the first time in my life. (The performance, which occurred in November 2011, was Edith Piaf’s “La vie en rose.”)

As for my electronic directory, I wish to begin by remembering and paying homage to Karl Heinz Bohrer’s fax machine—a half-electronic device, at best. It transmitted many beautiful handwritten (and sometimes dangerously encouraging) letters from London to California before a mechanical overload—for which I assume full responsibility—brought its

life to an end. My much-admired friend Harold Bloom cannot even be reached by fax machine, and he rarely answers letters. The classic medium of the printed word, then, is my only way to thank him for reading this book early on (a pleasant surprise for me). Klaus Birnstiel's dissatisfaction made me rewrite the final chapter, and he told me when it was enough. Lisa Block de Behar understood perfectly why *Graf Spee* had to be in the book (and not just because she lives in Montevideo). Countless times, Vittoria Borsò found the words I lacked. The untiringly productive Horst Bredekamp gave me the courage and intellectual energy to complete the manuscript the way that I (or he) believed it should be. If any English phrasings in the text strike native speakers as felicitous, they are from Erik Butler's mind and hand. Unhappy with what I had to say about Brazil, Pedro Dolabela Chagas encouraged me until I got it right (I hope). Sonja Fielitz fought unselfishly (and I fear it was not always easy) against my narcissism. Just before his unfortunate death, my friend Yehuda Elkana read the manuscript in a way that offered me, an author born in Germany in 1948, the ultimate and decisive comfort I needed. Grisha Freidin, who sometimes becomes my slightly older brother, sent me the most moving greetings imaginable from Saint Petersburg. Heike Gfrereis requested a public reading in English for a German national archive. Noreen Khawaja (who reads post-1945 Heidegger like no one before her) gave me, with her heart-warming reaction, the beautiful, dangerous, and encouraging illusion that I could write well. Florian Klinger made the most incisive (and least latent) distinction between agreement and divergence. Joachim Küpper told me this is a good book to read on rainy Berlin Sundays. Henning Marmulla remained unperturbed by innumerable stupid questions and outrageous proposals because he is the friend that he is—who believes in books more than he believes in their authors. Françoise Meltzer made me understand what it was I had always wanted to achieve. Sergio Missana, even though he is a major novelist, found something "literary" in the pages I had written. Ludwig Pfeiffer has consummate intellectual taste, and I trust him implicitly. Marci Shore writes letters so beautiful one can only respond in books. Martin Seel liked the manuscript; even though it was not his style, he understood the stakes breathtakingly well. Jan-Georg Soeffner read every word—several times—beginning with the first page of the first chapter. (He knows the book better than the author does, and supported it as only Italian godfathers and American middleweight champions can.) Peter

Sloterdijk summarized, in two sentences, what I had to say. (One of them made me melancholy—the other, almost proud.) José Luis Villacañas' reactions, had they been set before the volume at hand, would have provided an introduction better than the work they presented.

Some of the people I bothered with what I had written showed me how much they cared by letting me know that they did not much care for the book (or, at least, did not care for one chapter or the other). Christian Benne thought it was too early for an autobiography. Mara Delius limited lavish praise to texts that she really liked. Cosana Eram thought I was not up to speed. Amir Eshel politely did not write back. Ingrid Fernandez, *meine liebe Studentin*, gave me a B-minus (I fear). Hans-Martin Gauger was a bit underwhelmed (without saying so mercilessly). Agnès Gayraud found most of the chapters unfinished. Frank Guan couldn't discover a point. Ronmel Navas was friendly enough to let me know why he didn't like the writing. Melanie Möller, I believe, and Xavi Pla preferred other projects. Serge Zenkine clearly wanted me to rewrite the entire thing.

Other readers were encouraging in guarded, distant, and efficient ways. Christine Abbt associated latency and forgetting. Andino in Eugene, an undergraduate who had no "practical" reason to do so, was unbelievably generous in offering his reactions to the book, especially on the first chapter. Gordon Blennemann said he missed a Métro Station while reading another part. Bliss Carnochan believed that parts deserved to be called "tours de force." Adrian Daub wrote that he had no objections (as did Dan Edelstein). Karl Ellerbrock clearly prefers talking with me to reading my prose. Monika Fick writes the most beautiful letters, full of weighty compliments that feel as light as feathers. Denise Gigante's neighborly judgment and sympathy warm my heart—and some of my early mornings. Hans-Joerg Neuschäfer lost sleep over the final chapter. Aron Rodrigue said the book might interest historians. Mads Rosendal has mastered the generous art of sharing joy. Andreas Rosenfelder, after losing the record of one conversation, requested two or three more exchanges. Lindsay Waters discovered his interest late; Laura Wittman cannot help but live the past philosophically; and Raimar Zons wanted to know more. I thank them all very much. *Needless to say, they are fully and exclusively responsible for any shortcomings to be discovered on the preceding pages.*

Ricky, Marco, Anke, Sara, Christopher, Gina, Laura, Clara, and Diego give me a world far away from the books I write—yet it is so close to what

really matters that I sometimes believe (and it may be true) that I am writing only for them. I dedicate this book to the memory of Yasushi Ishii who, from the day we first met back in 1989 to his death in 2011, was like a younger brother. I loved him for many reasons. One of them is that he knew what it is like to inherit a past one does not want.

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